New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1945

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"Concert-Varieties"

NEW YORK POST
JUNE 2, 1945

Loads of Dancing, Little Humor in 'Concert Varieties'

By Wilella Waldorf

Four years ago, according to Deems Taylor, Billy Rose attended the opera and emerged with the conviction that something should be done to render it less exhausting. Result: "Carmen Jones." Lately, it appears, Mr. Rose has been investigating the concert field. He has discovered that concerts don't make any money, and that there is a monotony about them that puts people like Billy Rose to sleep.

"Concert Varieties," revealed last night at the Ziegfeld Theatre, is Mr. Rose's idea of what should be done to wake up audiences at Town Hall. First, he would remove the Curse of Culture. Second, he would add variety.

All this Mr. Taylor chummily confided to last night's audience at the Ziegfeld via microphone from one side of the stage, and it soon developed that Mr. Rose had indeed removed the Curse of Culture in that not a concert singer or instrumentalist of Town Hall style and calibre took part in the entertainment, while a number of variety and night club turns were in evidence.

For the most part, however, "Concert Varieties" is an exhibition of various styles of terpsichore. "Dance Varieties" would be a more accurate name for it.

Robbins and Dunham

Jerome Robbins, Janet Reed, John Kriza and some fellow artists from Ballet Theatre presented Mr. Robbins' "Interplay," to Morton Gould music, with decor and costumes by Carl Kent. According to the program, it is a ballet based on dance games, illustrating, among other things, the interplay of classic ballet steps and the contemporary spirit.

All of the dancers, including Mr. Robbins, are dressed kiddishly and there is a determined effort to be cute that sometimes seems rather self-conscious, but there is gayety and charm in the group, and good dancing. Janet Reed and John Kriza have a number called "By Play" that is especially attractive.

Katherine Dunham and her company, with the fascinating Miss Dunham herself on hand to streak around the stage in a series of outlandish costumes, sometimes smoking a large cigar, perform three numbers from their repertory with the customary theatrical dash and color. Rosario and Antonio, specialists in Spanish and gypsy dances, appear with or without castanets, in the colorful style that has made them popular in night clubs and musical comedy.

Lest anything in the dance line be overlooked, Imogene Coca and William Archibald perform a burlesque of "Afternoon of a Faun" that is one of the funniest interludes of an evening that is not precisely overwhelmed with laughs.

Despite the fact that he is bent on adding variety, Mr. Rose occasionally permits his show to become monotonous in that there is, perhaps, a bit too much emphasis on the dance, and not enough on comedy.

Mostel and Puppets

Zero Mostel, with Deems Taylor as straight man, does a fairly amusing take-off on an explosive Italian tenor, then repeats his inevitable Senatorial harangue, and winds up by bubbling like a percolator. It seems to us Mr. Mostel has been doing that Senate business far too long now. He might at least shift to the House of Representatives for a change.

'CONCERT VARIETIES.'

An entertainment presented by Billy Rose at the Ziegfeld Theater, Friday, June 1, 1945. Technical director, Carlton Winkler. The cast: Katherine Dunham & Company; Zero Mostel; Deems Taylor; Jerome Robbins & Company; Rosario & Antonio; Imogene Coca; Eddie Mayehoff.; Ammons, Johnson & Sidney Catlett; Salici Puppets, and Nestor Chayres.

Of the rest, Eddie Mayehoff turns out to be a sort of Zero Mostel without quite so much talent or perspiration. Ammons, Johnson and Sidney Catlett, are boogie-woogie duo pianists and an expert at the drums, while Nestor Chayres is an undistinguished South American tenor with a night club background, we have no doubt. Miss Coca, appearing solo as a comedienne, is in need of better material. She still has her collection of old coats and dilapidated furs, but she needs new gags and songs.

At this point let us break down and report that although much of the dancing is very agreeable, the Salici Puppets get our vote as the most entertaining performance of the evening. They open the show and Mr. Rose might be interested to know that a gentleman seated nearby openly disapproved of their act. "This is not art," he said distinctly.

Mr. Rose may be trying to expunge the Curse of Culture from the concert stage, but the more he tries to discourage the highbrows, apparently, the more they insist upon buying their way in

New York Journal-American
June 2, 1945

'Concert Varieties' Opens at Ziegfeld

By ROBERT GARLAND

This time, without benefit of champagne, chichi or even Lucius Beebe, Billy Rose's arts are really lively. Apart from a couple of hard-working funny fellows who come up perspiring from the night clubs, the "Concert Varieties" is bright, brittle and vastly entertaining. With Deems Taylor on hand to lend an air of spurious culture—the words are his, not mine — Mr. Rose has something there at his beautiful Ziegfeld Theatre.

He has, taking them as they come to mind, Imogene Coca; a new ballet by and with Jerome Robbins; Rosario and Antonio; Katherine Dunham and Her Dancers; the Salici Puppets; Nestor Chayres; Ammons, Johnson and Sidney Catlett; and a first-rate orchestra conducted by the fabulously named Pembroke Davenport. Also, before I succeed in forgetting them, those hard-working funny fellows, a Mr. Mayehoff and a Mr. Mostel by names.

As Master of Ceremonies, Deems Taylor takes all these in his stride, opening, carrying-on and closing the proceedings. Not since you saw him in The Circus has Deems been in finer fettle. He introduces the actors, explains their actions and pinch-hits as a spoken program for those who cannot read. Up around the Ziegfeld, the man's worth his weight in Roses.

* * *

Dancing Is First

I can't begin to tell you how much fun it is to have Imogene Coca back in the theatre again. What Jimmy Savo is to some people, La Coca is to me. Whether she's indulging in the one-strip tease approved by Mayor La Guardia, pretending to be an I. J. Fox in sheep's clothing or dancing a "L'Apres-Midi d'un Faune" —with young William Archibald —to end all afternoons and fauns, she's my pantomimic queen, my pet comedienne.

The new ballet by Jerome Robbins, with Jerome Robbins dancing in it, is "Interplay." There are four playful parts, "Free Play," "Horse Play," "By Play" and "Team Play." There are eight dashing dancers, Mr. Robbins, Janet Reed, John Kriza, Michael Kidd, Muriel Bentley, Rozsika Sabo, Bettina Rosay and Erik Kristen. The music is by Morton Gould "American Concertette." On the whole, the work is fresh, imaginative and colorful.

Rosario and Antonio are also fresh, imaginative and colorful. Even so, "Concert Varieties" would be better off with a little less of them. You—and I, too—can get enough, even of a good thing. But I—and you, too—would hate to do without their "Dansa Ritual del Fuego," their "Caprice Espahnol" and their "Canasteros de Triana," which brings the evening to a late and impassioned close. Wait for them, by all means.

* * *

Two-a-Day De Luxe

This time Billy Rose has, for the most part, glorified the art of dancing. Added to the glorifications of Jerome Robbins, Janet Reed, John Kriza, and Rosario and Antonio, is the glorification of Katherine Dunham, herself, in person, and her dancers. Assisted by the tropical tom-toms of Vicenty, Estrada and Mendez, Miss Dunham puts her best feet forward in "Callate," "Rhumba" and "Tropics," that admired one with the big cigar.

The Salici Puppets are as wonderful as ever, with their band, their jugglers and their prize piano player. Nestor Chayres and his accomplishments escape my memory for the present. Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson and Sidney Catlett have their ways with three drums and two pianos. And, right here and now, Mr. Chayres and his accomplishments come back to me. He sings with satisfaction and wears a white mess jacket to perfection.

On Eddie Mayehoff and Zero Mostel, the hard working funny fellows up from the night clubs, I'm not prepared to report. I'll have to take a course in night-clubbing before I put typewriter on table to write about them and their exotic art form. In my ignorance, Eddie is unedifying while Zero lives up to his given name . . . Nevertheless, "Concert Varieties" is the best vaudeville show I've ever seen. Or hope to see, believe me.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
JUNE 2, 1945

Rose Goes Highbrow with 'Concert Varieties'

New Show Strictly Tophat but Topnotch in Many Scenes

By BURTON RASCOE.

For all of Billy Rose's urchin efforts, in his entertaining advertisements and in his statements to the press through his very efficient free-space grabbers, to apply the hot-foot to the directors and devotees of grand opera and to belabor the sponsors, performers and cash customers of Town and Carnegie Halls with pig-bladder and slapstick, as being too stuffy, dignified and soporific, his "Concert Varieties," which opened at the Ziegfeld last night, though good, is on the sedate and cultural side.

The brow of Mr. Rose's new entertainment, indeed, is much more high than low. I think he would have been distressed last night if Mrs. Ira Katzenberg had come into the Ziegfeld carrying a bag of peanuts, if the Rhinelander Stewarts had arrived in day clothes, if Herbert Bayard Swope had considered the offering too frivolous for his contemplation, or if Kelcey Allen had stayed awake.

Though he may thumb his nose at Massenet and Brahms and jeer at monkey suits and tophats, Mr. Rose's aspirations are ever upward and onward, and he has reached the stage, in highbrowism, of the tuxedo and black fedora. If he doesn't call a halt in his soarings, we may lose the Billy Rose we once knew.

And Now Art.

With the tuxedo of last night's entertainment there was, to be sure, the white sox and tan shoes of honest, Diamond Horseshoe stuff, in the form of some low comedy by Zero Mostel and Eddie Mayhoff; but, for the most part, "Concert Varieties" is made up of such superior artistic items as are ordinarily sustained only by subsidies and subscriptions.

First of all, "Concert Varieties" has as master-of-ceremonies the erudite and extremely cultured composer, essayist, critic and expositor of classical music, Deems Taylor. (And I wish Mr. Rose's press agent would quit speaking of Mr. Taylor in this show as a "conferencier." That is a French word and it doesn't mean some one who introduces acts in a vaudeville show; it has two meanings: a straight lecturer, as in a classroom, and a mock lecturer who reads or delivers a "lecture" that is ostensibly serious but full of double-meanings and satirical allusions.) Mr. Taylor does his job with ease and informality but with dignity and seriousness.

Great Puppet Show.

The items on the bill are these, in their order:

The Salici Puppets—This is the most extraordinary puppet show I have ever seen, and I have seen many. The Salici team of puppet masters, consisting of three brothers and a sister, are third generation artists in this form of entertainment, and they do incredible things with their dolls, including having one act out two piano virtuoso numbers in perfect co-ordination with offstage piano playing. Inasmuch as this is one of the most charming numbers on the bill and is the opening item, you are advised not to arrive late lest you miss it.

Eddie Mayhoff—A popular night club entertainer whose speciality is that of giving burlesques of political speeches, pep talks to business employees and athletic teams. When he is at the top of his form, he is excellent; he was not at the top of his form last night.

Fine Spanish Dances.

Rosario and Antonio — Antonio is a male equivalent of Carmen Amaya. Their classical Spanish dances are perfection within the very severe demands of the form. Their Flamenco last night brought down the house. They appear three times on the bill.

Imogene Coca—This comedienne is new to me. She seems still in the imitative stage, reminding me at times of a female Harpo Marx and at other times of a second-rate Fannie Brice, and at still other times of various ladies who give imitations in night clubs. Her burlesques are broad and without subtlety; but she got a good hand last night, particularly in the second part of the bill in which, with William Archibald, she did a quite amusing burlesque of the Debussy ballet, "The Afternoon of a Faun."

Katherine Dunham and Her Dance Company — Miss Dunham and her troupe, with her best players of the hand-drums, give the most torrid of her South American seduction numbers, numbers already familiar to Dunham devotees. Although her dances are from Brazil, Mexico, Cuba and Martinique, the story and pattern always seem to be the same to me — girl wants a sweetheart; girl flirts with several boys; girl picks one, makes him fall for her and goes off with him. In one dance, she picks her man by feeling how hot his brow is, after arousing the interest of several by her wiggling.

Jerome Robbins — Mr. Robbins, choreographer of "Fancy Free" and "On The Town," has a new ballet, "Interplay," with music by Morton Gould and decor and costumes by Carl Kent. The program notes state: "Interplay is based on dance games. There is interplay among the dancers themselves. There is interplay of classical ballet steps and the contemporary spirit in which they are danced. There is the interplay of the dancers and orchestra, interplay of piano and other instruments and a play between classical and jazz elements." . . . This didn't clarify the ballet much for me; but the balletomaniacs on hand went wild about it.

Zero Mostel—Mr. Mostel, as an Italian tenor, is interviewed by Mr. Taylor; and Mr. Mostel imitates a coffee perculator. Many found this very funny indeed. I didn't.

Sidney Catlett—There is a dispute among drumming enthusiasts, of which I am one, as to whether Mr. Catlett is the No. 1 American drummer or Cozy Cole is. I am of the school that favors Mr. Cole, but Mr. Catlett is a virtuoso of marvelous dexterity. He has with him his night club buddies, Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson at the double pianos. Their number is topnotch art.

The orchestra is conducted by Pembroke Davenport, and it has a very good drummer itself in the pit.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
JUNE 2, 1945

Billy Rose's 'Concert Varieties' An Entertaining Vaudeville Show

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Without any pomp, production or pretense, Billy Rose's "Concert Varieties" is considerably more lively than was his "Seven Lively Arts." It is a vaudeville show minus acrobats, and a very enjoyable one.

It is also a vaudeville show minus a headliner—meaning that it employs no box-office name; and it is a dandy demonstration of the simple fact that fun is fun, and a warehouse full of scenery and props won't make it any more fun.

With Deems Taylor acting as an abashed master of ceremonies, "Concert Varieties" began last night at the Ziegfeld Theatre. The plan is to run the show a month, then hire a new set of acts and start all over again. The plan should work out all right, for Mr. Rose is a very experienced man when it comes to hiring acts.

The bill begins with the Salici puppets, a versatile and entertaining group of stuffed shirts and skirts. Never until last night did I see a puppet light a cigaret with a lighter and blow puffs of smoke. Damn clever.

The ensuing numbers tend strongly toward the dance, and this is all right by me because the dancers are varied in type, color and nationality. Rosario and Antonio do some excellent, crisp Spanish stuff, Imogene Coca and William Archibald do a delightful burlesque of "The Afternoon of a Faun" and Katherine Dunham and her group do three of the best Dunham numbers, including the bird-cage dance from Martinique.

Robbins Makes a Hit.

And, best of all, is a Jerome Robbins ballet with a musical setting of Morton Gould's "American Concertette." Mr. Rose should have had Mr. Robbins and his charming partner, Janet Reed, in "Seven Lively Arts."

There is, too, good vaudeville humor, including a monologue by Eddie Mayehoff and some extravagant mugging and gesturing by Zero Mostel. Albert Ammons and Pete Johnson, boogie-woogie pianists, and Sid Catlett, drummer, demonstrate the Negro's happy gift for rhythm, and Nestor Chayres, a soulful Mexican tenor, sings just like Richard Tauber.

This kind of layout, as I say, is fun—simple, but fun. And it's a pleasure to find Miss Coca—the most undiscovered comedienne of the last 15 years—being just as impish and fey as ever. Her one-woman fur fashion show is a very happy occasion, and her wooing of the faun to Debussy's music is good dance burlesque.

NEW YORK SUN
JUNE 2, 1945

'Concert Varieties' Presented by Billy Rose at the Ziegfeld Theater.

Having merged grand opera and musical comedy successfully in "Carmen Jones," the always versatile Billy Rose has now set out to perform a similar service for vaudeville and the concert stage. He is giving the first demonstration of what he has in mind in "Concert Varieties," which had its premiere last evening at the Ziegfeld Theater.

His first bill is too lengthy and in it he has failed to work out a smooth blend of the two entertainment forms. Vaudeville at present comes off second best. There was nothing in the lighter side of last night's program to equal the Jerome Robbins ballet "Interplay," which brought the first half of the proceedings to a close. Superbly danced to Morton Gould's "American Concertette," this portrayal of youngsters on a playground is both gay and imaginative and well deserved the storm of applause it evoked.

Katherine Dunham and her dance company, having moved ten blocks uptown after the recent closing of "Blue Holiday," also ran up a neat score on the side of the higher arts with three colorful numbers to the beat of the tom-toms. Dancing plays a large part in "Concert Varieties" and Rosario and Antonio team up effectively in their several appearances, especially in a fire dance. Nestor Chayres is grouped with them and brings a good voice to some South American songs.

Vaudeville's share leans heavily on night club talent. Imogene Coca grimaces her way through a demonstration of fur coats and later burlesques a fawn dance amusingly enough with William Archibald. Zero Mostel bellows as of yore through an interview with Deems Taylor and then obliges with his familiar politician's speech; Eddie Mayehoff, too, mimics an orator. The similarity of their comedy routines doesn't help the bill any, although others in the audience didn't seem to mind.

Matters get off to a good start with an exceedingly clever puppet show by the Salicis in which those out front are given a last minute look at how it's done, and the acts are rounded out by Ammons and John, boogie-woogie pianists whose adroit playing is somewhat overshadowed by the whirlwind drumming of Sidney Catlett, a stick rattler de luxe.

Deems Taylor acts as master of ceremonies and pulls the show together in the style of a radio announcer. His microphone chatter is always lightly amusing, but better fitted to the air waves than a stage. Despite some top notch features in "Concert Varieties," Mr. Rose still has to prove his point. HERRICK BROWN.

NEW YORK TIMES
JUNE 2. 1945

Vaude., as Art

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Since the "Seven Lively Arts" deserted his home house, the Ziegfeld, Billy Rose was sent scurrying around to find another art as replacement. He came up with vaudiville, and last evening opened the first of a projected series of "Concert Varieties." This is not the normal two-a-day, with sword swallowers and baggy pantaloons. As Deems Taylor, the M.C., phrased it last evening, Billy is trying to bring the concert hall down a bit nearer common humanity, which means that serious artists are leavened by alternates in the form of caricaturists and humorists. Despite the design, the result is a rather polite show, filled with experts but able to stand a good, roaring comedian to give it oomph.

* * *

"Concert Varieties" leans strongly toward the dancers. There is a new ballet by Jerome Robbins of "Fancy Free" and "On the Town" renown, with the choreographer and a company taking part to the music of Morton Gould's "American Concertette." This definitely would not have found favor at the Palace, but at the Ziegfeld it seems pleasantly in order. Rosario and Antonio, who are familiar to the clubs as well as stages, do a number of their Spanish dances. Finally, there are Katherine Dunham and her company in three numbers from their by now familiar repertory.

Among the other items on the bill are the Salici Puppets, which are excellent once again. The concert pianist is human, the dancers are graceful and toward the end of act the Salicis themselves uncover the mystery and show the workings of the strings. The Salicis are very big, the puppets very small. For students of the more recent classical music, Mr. Rose is offering Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson and the great Sidney Catlett, the former two boogie-woogieing at two pianos and the latter shaking the walls of Jericho with his drumming. There also is Nestor Chayres, a Mexican tenor.

It is in the department of comedy that "Concert Varieties" either slows down or takes a specialized education. Zero Mostel, Eddie Mayehoff and Imogene Coca appear at various times, and their styles are more satisfactory in the night clubs than on a large and lonely stage. Each of them goes on a little too long for comfort. Mr. Taylor is a gentle master of ceremonies for this pot-pourri from the high and lower arts, although occasionally his attitude seems to be that in offering a comedy number to the audience he is like a trainer throwing a fish to the seals. It is possible he, too, would prefer to throw a whale.

NEW YORK PM
JUNE 3, 1945

Culture Larded With Comedy

PM Reviews

—*Kronenberger*

At the outset of *Concert Varieties* Deems Taylor, the master of ceremonies, explained what the show was aiming at. Precisely as Billy Rose, feeling that opera was too stodgy or elevated for most people, had whipped up a *Carmen Jones* for their delight, now he was taking the somnolence out of the studio recital program with dashes of vaudeville and shots of comedy. The whole thing, so far as I could gather, was more of a humane than strictly artistic enterprise; a kind of Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Lowbrows.

In any case, *Concert Varieties* doesn't come off, by very long odds, the superb success that *Carmen Jones* did. With Bizet's marvelous score for a basis, a number of very talented people refashioned *Carmen* into a great Broadway show. But with *Concert Varieties* Mr. Rose hasn't refashioned the "concert" program; he had larded a lot of semi-highbrow and pseudo-highbrow dancing with Broadway picalilli. The formula has its good points, and so have some of the performers. There are, indeed, some delightful moments in the show. But despite Mr. Rose's intentions, *Concert Varieties* still doesn't seem to me to have enough variety; it dances itself into the doldrums. And just *because* of Mr. Rose's intentions, *Concert Varieties* strikes me as neither good highbrow nor good lowbrow, as neither real art nor real entertainment. It inhabits a kind of cultural half-world.

* * *

The high spots of the evening are the opening and closing of the first (and better) act. The Salici Puppets, with their own miniature variety show, are enchanting. Jerome Robbins' new ballet, *Interplay*, though a bit too cute in spots, is clean, fast, gymnastic, thoroughly light, and well patterned and danced. It seems to me much the best dancing of the evening. Rosario & Antonio, who are very good when they do popular native Spanish dances, are far less successful in the stylized world of *Caprice Espagnol* and de Falla's *Ritual Fire Dance*. (For this last the stage was drenched in incredible red light, as for the stage show in a movie palace.) Katherine Dunham is an attractive person, but I find her exotic numbers, in which she herself now acts and slouches as much as she dances, pretty unrewarding.

The only "concert" numbers on the program are a Mexican tenor, Nestor Chayres, whose place is in a night club; and a boogie-woogie session (two pianos and drum) in which Sidney Catlett's drumming was fairly spectacular. Against all this the comedy in the show was not, for me, countervailing. Zero Mostel has his own style, which gives many people pleasure; I'm afraid he leaves me cold. So does Eddie Mayehoff, whose comedy furthermore is too much like Mostel's for them to gain by being on the same program. Imogene Coca is an agreeable gal who can make funny faces and contrive amusing moments; but she is not quite big-league stuff. Nor does Deems Taylor, despite his natural manner, bring quite the personality or persiflage to his role that an evening like *Concert Varieties* calls for.

—LOUIS KRONENBERGER

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
JUNE 2, 1945

Helped by Dancing

By HOWARD BARNES

BILLY ROSE has knocked together a vaudeville show for his Ziegfeld Theater and the dancers make it a passable hot-weather entertainment. "Concert Varieties" is fortunate in its terpsichore. What with the brilliant ballet by Jerome Robbins, called "Interplay," and the sultry rhythms of Katherine Dunham and her company, the latest floor show in a playhouse has considerable dramatic excitement. The incidental acts, even with Deems Taylor on hand to lend what he terms a furious air of culture to the proceedings, are not so good.

• • •

For it takes a lot of fine acting to get away with a spot number in a theater as large as the Ziegfeld. Rose might better have made his latest offering a dance fiesta than to have introduced random and supposed comic routines in the offering. The Salici Puppets may bemuse you, if you have not seen them before. Eddie Mayehoff, Imogene Coca and the other specialty performers are more likely to put you to sleep, which would be in direct contradiction to the producer's project. Stepping saves this conglomerate concoction.

• • •

As a matter of fact, Edwin Denby, our dance editor, should be reviewing "Concert Varieties." A mere drama reviewer can merely report that "Interplay" is a remarkably fluent and eloquent ballet, with Robbins and his assistants keeping a stage instinct with explicit movement. The music by Morton Gould is on the prosaic and derivative side, but it is adequate accompaniment for a delightful dance pantomine in four parts—"Free Play," "Horse Play," "By Play" and "Team Play." Janet Reed is the chief collaborator with Robbins in the interlude. All the dancers are well worth seeing.

• • •

So are the Katherine Dunham hip-wavers. Brazil, Mexico and Martinique inspire the beat and postures of a fascinating trio of Latin dance litanies. Miss Dunham herself is triumphant and she has had the good sense in her direction to make a Callate or a Rhumba somehting more than a series of bumbs. Rosario and Antonio are excellent in Manuel de Falla's "Dansa Rituel del Fuego" and are quite competent in their other numbers. "Concert Varieties" is first-rate when it is a dance recital. It is a slip-shod and wearisome vaudeville entertainment.

"Hollywood Pinafore"

NEW YORK POST
JUNE 1, 1945

'Hollywood Pinafore' Not as Side-Splitting as It Sounds

By Wilella Waldorf

Obviously, if Hollywood had existed back in the seventies and eighties, W. S. Gilbert would have satirized it, and his partner, Sullivan, would have composed the proper music to go with the words. But the movies arrived too late to be immortalized in a Savoy opera. It has remained for George S. Kaufman to pick up Gilbert's acid pen and turn the book and lyrics of "H. M. S. Pinafore" into a modern epic of the cinema city, retaining the music unswung, unboogie-woogied and unjitter-bugged.

Unfortunately, "Hollywood Pinafore," revealed at the Alvin Theatre last night, is a sad disappointment. Perhaps Mr. Kaufman intended it simply as a spring frolic and its shortcomings should not be regarded too seriously. After all, Victor Moore is in it and anything Mr. Moore happens to stroll through is bound to have its merry moments.

But it was impossible not to expect a good deal of "Hollywood Pinafore." Mr. Kaufman is the only modern playwright we can think of at the moment who would dare to tamper with Gilbert without getting shot for it. Furthermore, with Moss Hart he once wrote a play about Hollywood called "Once in a Lifetime" that was not only clever but downright hilarious. That was fifteen years ago, to be sure, and in the meantime the movies have been extensively kidded on the stage, in print and even on the screen itself.

Nevertheless, we had been looking forward to "Hollywood Pinafore" as a modern "Once in a Lifetime" set to Sullivan music, and it is our reluctant duty to report today that it almost never comes off. What, never? Well, hardly ever.

Joe Porter, Producer

Even as a spring frolic, it is none too frolicsome. The scene is the impressive entrance hall of Pinafore Pictures Studio. Joseph Porter is no longer an admiral, but a big producer. Mike Corcoran isn't the captain of the ship. He's a director. Josephine, his daughter, is a movie star who loves a writer. Nothing could be further beneath her. Writers in Hollywood, according to Mr. Kaufman, are dressed in stripes like prisoners, and when allowed to attend story conferences they are gagged and bound.

Dick Live-Eye is an agent who gets 10 per cent of everything, and Little Buttercup has become Louhedda Hopsons, a composite of two of Hollywood's most successful gossip columnists, nicknamed Little Butter-Up. Miss Hebe is Mr. Porter's secretary, and his sisters and his cousins and his aunts—all very lovely—have nice cushy jobs in the studio.

This sounds very funny, but it isn't as funny as it sounds. Some of the new Kaufman lyrics are amusing, but often they are labored and even somewhat sophomoric. Furthermore, the performance is very deliberately and awkwardly paced, and the songs unevenly presented. George Rasely, Annamary Dickey and Gilbert Russell all sing well, but some of "Pinafore's" most familiar numbers fail to register as they should, not always because of a lack of vocal talent in some of the cast, but because there is a fundamental clash in style between Mr. Kaufman's Hollywooden lyrics and Sullivan's melodies, originally as satiric in their way as any of Gilbert's fun poking at the Royal Navy.

Keeping the Stars Busy

The gaiety and spirit of much of the choral work is similarly handicapped, not because the chorus can't sing—as a matter of fact it's very good—but because the ensemble staging is languid to the point of exhaustion, with beautiful starlets stalking around like so many bored models, or executing routine ballet exercises while the orchestra carries on with the Sullivan score more or less intact, except for some shifting around to make the two stars, Victor Moore and William Gaxton, more prominent. At one point it is even necessary to dip into "The Pirates of Penzance" for the policeman's song to keep Mr. Gaxton sufficiently occupied.

Mr. Moore is funniest when eating his graham crackers and milk at an interpolated story conference which has nothing to do with "Pinafore," and Shirley Booth is comical as the syndicated columnist, though she, and all of them, were occasionally stumped by Mr. Kaufman's habit of sticking to the old-style "I would fain see thee" or "Know you not the reason?" one minute, and bursting into up-to-the-minute studio slang and wisecracks the next. Mary Wickes helped out when she could.

A tip-off on the state of the audience last night may be had from the fact that the loudest and most persistent applause was for Antony Tudor's ballet, "Success Story," danced by Viola Essen and a good company. Mr. Tudor's ballet is by no means one of his outstanding efforts, but it comes at a time when it is a relief to get away from Kaufman-and-Sullivan for a spell. The ballet is danced to a Sullivan medley including everything from "The Mikado," "Iolanthe" and "The Yeomen of the Guard" to "The Lost Chord."

'HOLLYWOOD PINAFORE.'

A musical comedy presented by Max Gordon, in association with Meyer Davis, at the Alvin Theater, Thursday evening, May 31, 1945. Book and lyrics revised by George S. Kaufman (with apologies to W. S. Gilbert). Music by Sir Arthur Sullivan. Staged by Mr. Kaufman; Production supervised by Arnold Saint Subber; ballet by Antony Tudor; setting and lighting by Jo Mielziner; ensemble dances by Douglas Coudy; modern costumes by Kathryn Kuhn; period costumes by Mary Percy Schenck. The cast:

Joseph W. Porter	Victor Moore
Mike Corcoran	George Rasely
Ralph Rackstraw	Gilbert Russell
Dick Live-Eye	William Gaxton
Brenda Blossom	Annamary Dickey
Louhedda Hopsons	Shirley Booth
Bob Beckett	Russ Brown
Miss Hebe	Mary Wickes
Miss Gloria Mundi	Diana Corday
Miss Beverly Wilshire	Pamela Randell
Little Miss Peggy	Rita Mayer
Doorman	Dan De Paolo
Ballet Dancer	Viola Essen
Secretaries	Jackson Jordan, Eleanor Prentiss, Drucilla Strain
Guard	Ernest Taylor

NEW YORK SUN
JUNE 1, 1945

'Hollywood Pinafore,' Gilbert and Sullivan a la Kaufman, Has Premiere at Alvin.

There wasn't a single sailor, much less an admiral, in "Hollywood Pinafore," which Max Gordon, in association with Meyer Davis, placed aboard the stage of the Alvin Theater in most bountiful fashion last evening. Nobody minded, however. Everybody was chuckling too much as George S. Kaufman skillfully transformed the old W. S. Gilbert prank about the British Navy into a lampoon of the present-day film colony to miss a little thing like nautical touches.

In the Kaufman version "Pinafore" has become the story of "the lad who loved a salary." In the process Joseph Porter has lost his title and his fleet, but gained rule over Pinafore Pictures, whose claim is "Pick of the Pack," and Josephine, now Brenda Blossom, movie star, pines for Ralph Rackstraw, lowly script writer, with all the fervor that her predecessor displayed for her humble man of the sea. Though the background has been changed, Kaufman follows the old Gilbert plot closely and Sir Arthur Sullivan's lovely score is retained in its original tempo. At occasional moments last night it seemed possible that a beat or two in the vogue of the Harlem Pinafore just around the corner might have enhanced the Hollywood mood, but with Kaufman contributing lyrics right out of his top drawer such thoughts were easily routed.

Victor Moore, of course is movie magnate Porter, and from the instant he comes bashfully onto the scene in the wake of the best film lot fanfare, he is his old hesitant and steadily amusing self. To watch him slowly eat a bowl of crackers and milk during a hilarious story conference is to encounter comedy at its funniest. His long standing partner, William Gaxton, is Dick Live Eye, lamenting with an assist from "Penzance" that "an agent's lot is not a happy one" and briskly messing matters up as he watches with his unpatched eye for his ten per cent. Gaxton and Moore may not be completely at home in the Savoyard style, but they are two mighty handy fellows for any show to have.

The evening's top honors are shared too by Shirley Booth and Viola Essen. Miss Booth's singing as Louhedda Hopsons, columnist about "Miss Butter-up" enlivens proceedings right at the start and in the second act Miss Essen is the central figure of the delightful Anthony Tudor ballet which portrays with charm, imagination, and humor the success story of a Hollywood star. Annamary Dickey and Gilbert Russell bring both good voices and pleasing acting ability to the harassed lovers. Jo Mielziner has designed a gorgeous Hollywood studio setting and lighted the production to perfection too.

Admittedly undertaking a theatrical stunt, Kaufman has adroitly kept it from ever wearing itself dangerously thin as such stunts can do. As a result "Hollywood Pinafore" lands definitely in the upper brackets of Broadway's evenings.

HERRICK BROWN.

NEW YORK TIMES
JUNE 1, 1945

'Hollywood Pinafore,' or 'The Lad Who Loved a Salary,' Opens With Messrs. Moore and Gaxton at the Alvin

By LEWIS NICHOLS

Last week the Gilbert and Sullivan "H.M.S. Pinafore" was moving down the river in "Memphis Bound," and last night it drifted to the Coast with "Hollywood Pinafore." This George S. Kaufman revision, whereby the lass who loved a sailor becomes a lad who loved a salary, should be much better than it is. William Gaxton and ictorV Moore are making one of their all-too-infrequent appearances in the leading roles, the singers for the most part sing nicely, and Max Gordon has offered a good production. But as it takes place at the Alvin, "Hollywood Pinafore" shows zest only once in a while; it is one of those musicals which seem never to get fully under way. From the auspices and circumstances a good deal could be expected, but the result is a little disappointing.

"Hollywood Pinafore" retains the music and the story structure of the original. Mr. Kaufman has changed the locale from a ship to the Pinafore Studios on the Coast. Dick Dead-Eye has become Dick Live-Eye, an agent; Josephine is a screen star; the ruler of the Navy is the head of the studio. Ralph Rackstraw in the new form is a writer; the plot is about whether Josephine shall marry the boss or the chained man of letters. Mr. Kaufman also has written new lyrics for the songs. The "policeman's lot" number from "The Pirates of Penzance" has been interpolated, and some of Sir Arthur's non-"Pinafore" music is used for a ballet; otherwise the composer's thoughts on the opera are set down as he wrote.

Mr. Kaufman's thoughts on Hollywood are well-known; he has expressed them before. In his libretto for "Hollywood Pinafore," however, he has not sustained his satire. Every now and again there is a sharp, devastating line, but too often Mr. Kaufman is forced to return again to his original joke—that the writer out West is a thing of contempt. There is one very funny scene of a story conference, where the librettist, all on his own, has a field day, but when he is keeping within Gilbert's story, he seems held back. It is possible he should have thrown away the plot and kept only his ideas on Hollywood. Some of the dialogue is in the "I prithee" manner, the rest in straight Alvin Theatre; and the mingling of styles is more distracting than funny.

As the agent who beats his way to 10 per cent wherever he can find it, Mr. Caxton is his usual bouncing self; he is in his normal place, which is all over the stage. Mr. Moore, as the definitely dim head of the studio; is good, of course, but he may be slightly bothered by character trouble. The traditional Moore figure is dim, but he also has a touch of pathos; reflecting on Hollywood, Mr. Kauffman doesn't trouble about pathos, and so the actor is left with one of his best talents unused. In "Hollywood Pinafore," Mr. Moore is a figure of fun; he had a more rounded life as Throttlebottom, for example.

The singing is first-rate. Annamary Dickey, as the movie star, looks like one and sings a million tiems better. Gilbert Russell, as Ralph, the writer, also has a good voice; and all the soloists and the chorus are distinct and clear. Since Mr. Kaufman has written musing lyrics, that is on the credit side. Definitely on the same side is a ballet showing the birth of a star, Viola Essen being excellent as the dancer. This was the one thing which brought the show to a halt last evening. George Rasely has the part of a director; Shirley Booth is funny as a columnist called Louhedda Hopsons ("Little Miss Butter-Up"), and Mary Wickes is wry as a secretary. Mr. Kaufman has directed and Jo Mielziner has designed the settings.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
JUNE 1, 1945

Worth Four Cheers

By HOWARD BARNES

GEORGE S. KAUFMAN must have had great fun revising the book and lyrics of "H. M. S. Pinafore." At any rate, his satirical interpolation at the Alvin makes for a gaily impudent musical show which brightens the tail-end of the season immeasurably. The nautical operetta has now become a sharply barbed travesty of movie nonsense under the title of "Hollywood Pinafore." (Or the Lad Who Loved a Salary). Victor Moore, William Gaxton, Shirley Booth and the other principals catch every colloquial inflection of a venerable lampoon brought up to date. The production is varied and resplendent. Best of all, Sir Arthur Sullivan's score remains intact.

The piece has been written "with the deepest apologies to W. S. Gilbert," but they are not really necessary. The Kaufman wit may not be as time resistant as that of his eminent predecessor, but it is full of laughter. Since he has hewn close to the over-all pattern of "H. M. S. Pinafore," the effect is one of revivifying a classic rather than taking untoward liberties with it. One may feel reasonably certain that a lot of people will discover the delights of "H. M. S. Pinafore" for the first time in the brilliant Alvin Theater reworking of the show. For this day and age, Hollywood is an excellent substitute for the Royal Navy as a butt for caricature.

There are times when "Hollywood Pinafore" becomes a bit labored, but they are few and far between. The point is that Moore and Gaxton are on hand to sustain the comedy when the satirical thrusts become repetitious, that Miss Booth sings and acts magnificently, that there is a stunning ballet by Anthony Tudor and that the Kaufman staging is timed and articulated to perfection. A Hollywood story conference catches up the full flood of entertainment, just as it is about to sag. Clever songs fill the stage with humor as well as melody, even when there is a minimum of action. It is a tour-de-force, to be sure, but that can be very rewarding in the theater.

The performances are beautifully balanced. Moore, as pompous head of a studio rather than Sir Joseph Porter, "ruler of the Queen's Navee," is downright wonderful as he realizes the new Kaufman caricature. Gaxton, to his great credit, keeps the role of Dick Live-eye, a Hollywood agent, in amusing focus, while Annamary Dickey and Gilbert Russell sing the romance of a star and a lowly script writer superbly. Right up there at the top is Miss Booth, as Louhedda Hopsons, a columnist, instead of Little Buttercup, the bumboat woman. Her singing of the Buttercup song is the high point of the first act. She winds up the proceedings on a note of high gayety.

As already noted, the Sullivan score is always at hand to keep the offering musically magnificent. It was wise of Kaufman and his co-workers to leave it in all its loveliness. Only in the ballet, which is danced miraculously by Viola Essen is the melodic line interrupted and it was well worth doing. Mary Wickes, George Rasely and Russ Brown are some of the able assistants in modernization of Gilbert and Sullivan. Jo Mielziner has designed and lighted the show artfully and the orchestra never falters. "Hollywood Pinafore" is audacious and vastly entertaining.

New York Journal-American
June 1, 1945

'Hollywood Pinafore' Comes to the Alvin

By ROBERT GARLAND

Nowadays, Broadway musical comedy makers continue to fall back on "Pinafore." Need a good tune? Try "Pinafore." Need a good lyric? Try "Pinafore." Need a good libretto? Try "Pinafore." You don't have to beg. You don't have to borrow. You don't even have to steal. Gilbert and Sullivan are dead, their "Pinafore" is in the public domain. Come on in, boys. Help yourselves, boys. Start picking, boys.

The boys came on in. The boys helped themselves. The boys started picking. Don Walker. Clay Warnick. Albert Barker. "With gratitude"! But the latest boy to come on in, to help himself and to start picking is George S. Kaufman. The George S. Kaufman whose "Hollywood Pinafore" was displayed last night upon the Alvin's stage in the impressive presence of a yoo-hoo congregation in which notables were nonentities.

In programs in 52d st., Mr. Kaufman offers his "deepest apologies" to the defunct Mr. Gilbert, whose justly celebrated lyrics he has turned inside out, upside down and drastically discarded. Sir Arthur Sullivan's justly celebrated music remains un-Kaufmanized and generally intact. It sounds strange, however, without its customary jingles. It sounds strange and sick-at-heart for those words of W. S. Gilbert's.

Did you ever happen to hear of an operetta called "Haddon Hall"? No? Well, that, too, is Sullivan without Gilbert.

* * *

Tongue in Cheek

Finding himself in a collegiate frame of mind, George S. Kaufman has seen fit to translate the story of the lass who loved a sailor from the quarter deck of the good ship Pinafore, somewhere at sea, to the reception room of the not-so-good studios of Pinafore Pictures, somewhere in Hollywood. "Hollywood Pinafore," as the translation is entitled, is the story of "the lad who loved a salary"—as don't we all?

Joseph W. Porter is head of Pinafore Pictures. Ralph Rackstraw is a humble script writer. Dick Live-Eye is a 10-per-cent-er. Brenda Blossom is a movie star, formerly known as Josephine. Louhedda Hopsons is a celebrated columnist. Bob Becket is a press agent. Miss Hebe is the great Mr. Porter's secretary. And so it goes, with a Gloria Mundi, a Beverly Wilshire and a little Miss Peggy as extra added attractions.

Having got these names, you've got your "Pinafore"-ian story. Brenda Blossom, the erstwhile Josephine, is in love with Ralph Rackstraw, the humble writer. Ralph, in true W. S. Gilbert fashion, loves her right back again. But she is rich and he is poor, she is high and he is low, so what is there to do about it? Nothing! Nothing but what Mr. Gilbert did years and years ago to everybody's everlasting satisfaction.

Now, George S. Kaufman redoes it with his tongue in Mr. Gilbert's cheek. If hearing and seeing are believing, Mr. Gilbert doesn't care a whole lot for it.

* * *

Cute, Collegiate

This would be as cute as cute if cooked up by some clever boys at college. But, as adult Broadway entertainment, it's somewhat juvenile. Last evening, the gag began to wear thin quite a while before the mockery was over. Frankly, I hate to think of that final stanza without Anthony Tudor's interpolated ballet, "Success Story," with Viola Essen dancing entrancingly, flawlessly therein.

A famous cast deals famously with Mr. Kaufman's transplanted Savoy-ards. As goes without printing, it's sheer joy to have Victor Moore and William Gaxton teamed up again. Mr. Moore is once more Alexander Throttlebottom, adrift this time in Hollywood rather than in Washington, D. C. Mr. Gaxton is once more his brisk, go-getting self. In the scene at the conference table, the offering's best, they're at their satiric tops.

Gilbert Russell, as Ralph Rackstraw, sings melodiously, as does Annamary Dickey as the Brenda who is really Josephine. Russ Brown is a musical Maney, if there ever was one. Shirley Booth unites a split personality as Louhedda Hopsons. Mary Wickes is an attention-attracter as Miss Hebe, professional yes-woman to Mr. Porter, who won't take "No" for an answer. Production and costumes are all they should be. But—

Well, "Hollywood Pinafore" is better in theory than in performance. After all, a Kaufman is a Kaufman while a Gilbert is a genius. That nobody, not even Mr. Kaufman, will deny.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
JUNE 1, 1945

Kaufman's 'Hollywood Pinafore' Is Merely 'Twice in a Lifetime'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

We have—and we love—our Stephen Fosters, our Jerome Kerns, our George Gershwins, our Vincent Youmanses and our Irving Berlins. Two were, and the rest are, great men: men who have given us simple and lovely songs which will stay with us always. But none of these has reached the stature of an Englishman, Sir Arthur Sullivan, for to none of these others has so much been done by so many.

Sullivan, composer of "The Lost Chord" and a number of Victorian musical comedies, has been swung, jived, jazzed and kidded, and always his work has survived. Last week Bill Robinson and a friendly company began giving a Harlem twist to his score for "H. M. S. Pinafore" in a show called "Memphis Bound." Last night at the Alvin Theatre Sir Arthur's score for the same show was played again for a musical called "Hollywood Pinafore."

This time the music was not swung or kidded, but played straight by a very good orchestra which came as close as possible to the original instrumentation. This time it was the lyrics and plot of "Pinafore"—W. S. Gilbert, author—which had the modern twist put upon them. The man who did this job was George S. Kaufman.

Much in Its Favor.

Not at any opening this fine season have I had so grand a time for the first twenty minutes, and not at any time have I subsided thereafter so quickly. This report must be one of disappointment, and it is hard to write because on paper everything is in favor of "Hollywood Pinafore."

Max Gordon has produced the musical, and when Mr. Gordon puts on a show he gives it everything that can be found in the way of players, costumes, lights and sets. Mr. Kaufman has written it, and there is no sharper wit than his working for the stage. The stars are Victor Moore and William Gaxton, and there is no more popular stage team.

There are great delights in "Hollywood Pinafore," like the emergence of Shirley Booth as a splendid music-show comedienne and the enchanting singing and presence of Annamary Dickey, but the overall effect is one of anticlimax. The trouble is that, many years ago, Mr. Kaufman and Moss Hart wrote an immensely funny play called "Once in a Lifetime."

Hollywood got kidded good in "Once in a Lifetime." It needed it then. It has changed since and does not need it now—not so much, anyway—and the burlesquing of its producers, directors, writers and postures is old-hat.

In "Hollywood Pinafore" Mr. Kaufman's hero, Ralph Rackstraw, is a writer who wears a convict suit, is bound and gagged upon occasion, and is paid $75 a week while Victor Moore, the simple-minded studio head, earns a million or two a year. This may have been true once but is not true now, for Hollywood writers get a pretty penny. And, anyhow, I don't think the moviegoing or playgoing publics give a damn one way or the other.

The Old Team Returns.

Mr. Gaxton's original role was that of Dick Deadeye. In the Kaufman version he becomes Dick Live-Eye, a movie agent. His part means nothing to the plot and neither does Mr. Moore's, but when the two are together they rekindle one's affection for Wintergreen and Throttlebottom.

The Kaufman lyrics, which switch Gilbert into Hollywood and yet take no liberties with the Sullivan score, are frequently smart. Some times they also sound as though Mr. Kaufman has learned all he knows of Hollywood by reading "Variety" and "The Reporter" without ever having lived in the place. His most delightful conceit is the role of a columnist, Louhedda Hopsons, who sings "I'm Called Little Butter-Up." In this part Miss Booth is grand.

There isn't much plot about who loves whom and who hates whom so there is not a great deal of movement to "Hollywood Pinafore." This static quality is not helped by playing the whole show in a single set. It is a very handsome set by Jo Mielziner—but I got to wishing that a traveler curtain would close and somebody would come out and start hoofing.

There is some very nice dancing, though. There's a Hollywood ballet devised by Antony Tudor and danced by Viola Essen which had the first-nighters cheering Miss Essen.

The women in "Hollywood Pinafore" are quite wonderful—distinguished-looking as well as beautiful. And they all wear false bosoms which stick way out into 52d St.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
JUNE 1, 1945

'Hollywood Pinafore' Brings G&S Satire Up to Date

By Burton Rascoe

It looks to me as though Max Gordon and Meyer Davis had hit the jackpot with "Hollywood Pinafore," which bowed in at the Alvin last night before a jubilantly responsive audience. It is a joyous thing—voluptuous and comical, sensuous and good-naturedly satirical, fast-paced, artistic and melodious—an optical and auricular delight, with laughs for the diaphragm and for the cerebrum as well. And it brings back together that fine comedy team, William Gaxton and Victor Moore.

The music is Sir Arthur Sullivan's for "H. M. S. Pinafore," plus a tune from "The Pirates of Penzance" and some other Sullivan melodies orchestrated by Hans Spialek for a stunning and very amusing ballet-pantomime by Antony Tudor. But there resemblance to "Pinafore" ceases; for, while following the W. S. Gilbert's book for pattern and using the Gilbert lyrics for models, George S. Kaufman has succeeded in a brilliant transference of the scene to Hollywood, converting the "Pinafore" characters into a movie producer, an agent, a director, a gossip columnist, a star, a scenario writer and other attaches of a movie studio pay roll.

A Classic Modernized.

Thus the Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, K. C. B., who was such a failure at everything else that he naturally became the ruler of the king's nay-vee, becomes Joseph Porter (Victor Moore), head of Pinafore Pictures, who had been such a flop at everything, from making artificial flowers to braking on the B&O, that he inevitably became the ruler of the studi-yos; Capt. Corcoran becomes a director; Ralph Rackstraw becomes one of the untouchables, the lowest form of life in the Hollywood social scale—a writer; Dick Deadeye (William Gaxton) becomes Dick Live-eye, a 10-per-center or agent; Cousin Hebe (Mary Wickes) becomes one of the producer's relatives in Hollywood's vast system of nepotism; Little Miss Buttercup becomes Louhedda Hopsons, a columnist, known as Little Miss Butterup, for buttering-up is her trade, and so on.

Thus it will be seen that Mr. Kaufman has Americanized and modernized a classic, and the apparent ease and cleverness with which he has done it make one wonder why it had never been done before. But it took someone as theater-wise and as expert in the writing craft as Mr. Kaufman to do it; for it meant creating new satirical allusions for the somewhat obsolete ones of "Pinafore" which would be as readily appreciated by the average playgoer as were Gilbert's allusions to the Britons of his day. You may say that the phantasmagoria of Hollywood has been satirized over and over again, even by Mr. Kaufman; but there, again, Mr. Kaufman has added just those witty touches of sardonic observation and surprise which give the show freshness with the basic element of familiarity.

Gay Cast.

Of course, Mr. Kaufman's work is enormously enhanced not only by the comic genius of the Messrs. Gaxton and Moore, the burlesque talent of Shirley Booth and Mary Wickes, the romantic appeal of Annamary Dickey and Gilbert Russell and the voices of the Lynn Murray Singers, but also by an over-all production, under the supervision of Arnold Saint Subber, that is one of the finest New York has ever seen. The sets and lighting by Joe Mielziner are properly garish and splendiferous; the costumes by Kathryn Kuhn are Ziegfeldian with more than a touch of Cecil B. De Mille, and they are draped (and revealingly) upon such beautiful and curvaceous girls that you wonder where they found them all. (One girl in particular, Pamela Randell, who has a bit part as a minor movie star, is of extraordinary beauty.)

Viola Essen in Mr. Tudor's ballet-pantomime, which depicts how a silly country girl is glamorized and made into a star, received the most sustained outburst of applause that greeted any number last night. But demand for encores for song numbers were frequently not complied with because the show runs from 8:30 to 11:15 as it is. An orchestra under the baton of George Hirst played the Sullivan music just right.

NEW YORK PM
JUNE 1, 1945

Kaufman Bats For Gilbert

—Kronenberger—

After all these years, *Pinafore* is threatening to rival Frank Merriwell. Last week came *Memphis Bound*, or *Pinafore on the Mississippi*; last night came *Pinafore in Hollywood*. In this newest volume in the series, George S. Kaufman has made landlubbers out of Gilbert's tars; while retaining all of Sullivan's music unjived and unjazzed, he has contributed a whole new book and set of lyrics that spoof the movie industry. I don't think it's simply because *Memphis Bound* got here first that *Hollywood Pinafore* clearly comes in second. The two shows differ widely enough in spirit for there to have been room for them both. But they differ in effect to this decisive extent—that while *Memphis Bound* has an awful lot of faults, it adds up to an enjoyable evening; and that while *Hollywood Pinafore* has a number of virtues, it is really not much fun.

Mr. Kaufman offers his "deepest apologies to W. S. Gilbert" for what he has done, but there was no need to do so. Beyond the fact that the strong point of *Pinafore* has always been the score and not the book, the impulse to have a modern go at Gilbert's yarn, to provide fresh targets for satire, to raise laughs by more recognizable allusions, is—for somebody ingenious enough—a perfectly sound impulse. And Mr. Kaufman is certainly ingenious enough. All the same, the job is a very ticklish one. It's not only that the book and lyrics themselves must be up to snuff; but that, in providing them, you are really obligating yourself to furnish a brand-new show. Even with the support of Sullivan's music, it has to have its own full quota of liveliness, freshness, gaiety and individuality. But the over-all quality of *Hollywood Pinafore*—in spite of Mr. Kaufman's excellent direction and some very good performers—is something much less exhilarating; merely a kind of cleverness.

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It seems to me that one very big reason for the essential failure of the show is its Hollywood subject-matter. Not even Mr. Kaufman can do a *Twice in a Lifetime*. For one thing the time is long past; Hollywood—at least along the usual satiric lines—has been milked dry. We all know too well what's wrong with it and what's funny about it. And though Mr. Kaufman achieves some direct hits, he is plugging what is virtually a corpse. Moreover, in *Hollywood Pinafore* he is writing in the broad terms of musical comedy, and is by so much the more forced to make his spoofing unsubtle. It's too repetitious, also; and the use of a lot of archaic diction ("Wilst tell me?" etc.) does not help matters, either.

Beyond that, I'm not sure that the *Pinafore* score, which despite its share of amusing ditties is generally more operatic and full-bodied than most of Sullivan, ties in too well with Hollywood. Certainly the lovelier songs—very well sung by Annamary Dickey and Gilbert Russell—have no affinity with the new lyrics. For all the lighter tunes Mr. Kaufman has done very well with the lyrics, though they are oftener on the clever than the funny side.

The final trouble with *Hollywood Pinafore*—and then I will pass on to pleasanter matters—is that it is too verbal, for musical comedy, in its fun. It hasn't enough life, go, physical zip to it. Antony Tudor's ballet may not be remarkable, but it comes as a fine breath of fresh air; and by doing so, points up the lack of other dancing and production numbers, a lack that hinders the show from getting off the ground.

• • •

In smaller ways Mr. Kaufman has been inventive and amusing. He has introduced some very good bits of stage detail, got some laughs out of a Hollywood conference, introduced script writers in convicts stripes, and turned Buttercup into Butter-Up—a Hollywood columnist named Louhedda Hopsons.

The cast is a generally very good one. Victor Moore plays Joseph Porter, a producer (all the *Pinafore* characters have been put to Hollywood use); and plays him, much of the time with his usual bumbling, helpless charm. He is not, however, altogether well cast. William Gaxton is Dick Live-Eye, an agent; and a properly breezy one. Shirley Booth plays the nosey Louhedda with a good deal of satiric insight and skill; and Mary Wickes makes an amusing secretary. Viola Essen does a fine dancing job in the ballet, and appeared to be the heroine of the evening. Jo Mielziner's expertly hideous set is just right, and he has been equally expert with the lighting.

—Louis Kronenberger

"Memphis Bound"

New York Journal-American

May 25, 1945

'Bojangles' Robinson Is 'Memphis Bound'

By ROBERT GARLAND

If, last night, the initial Manhattan showing of "Memphis Bound" had held out 40 minutes longer, Bill Robinson would have been able to celebrate his 67th birthday right up there on the brilliantly lighted stage of the Broadway Theatre. The one, the only, star of this, John Wildberg's resplendent new song-and-dance diversion, enjoyed himself, his show and his Birthday Eve concurrently.

So did I! For Mr. Robinson is at his Bojangles best in a musical comedy the father of which could easily have been "Show Boat" and the mother of which was most certainly "Pinafore."

Mr. Wildberg, this time with Vinton Freedley in the picture, has given this distinguished offspring a lavish, yet always tasteful, production, with backgrounds by George Jenkins, costumes by Lucinda Ballard, book by Albert Barker and Sally Benson, lyrics and music by Don Walker and Clay Warnick. And inspiration from a couple of gone but not forgotten Englishmen, Gilbert and Sullivan by name.

Along with an all-Negro cast that couldn't be improved upon, it adds up to a memorable afternoon or evening in the Land of Professional Make-Believe. See it and hear it you must. But don't ask me to get you in.

Sepia Savoyards

You see, you hear, a good deal of Bill Robinson during the course of "Memphis Bound." A good deal, yes. Too much, no. Never before has Bojangles been presented with so far-flung an opportunity to strut the stuff that's in him. Old stuff is there, middle-aged stuff is there, and there's young stuff you never even dreamed of. Not only is Mr. Robinson a good singer and a great dancer, but he's a Savoyard.

Wait, if you can, until you hear him deal with "I Am the Monarch of the Sea" and "The Ruler of the Queen's Navee," with "Farewell My Own" and "Trial By Jury." G. & S. have been waiting for him.

They've been waiting for Ada Brown, Billy Daniels, Sheila Guys, Avon Long and the Delta Rhythm Boys as well. Especially for Avon Long, whose "I Am the Captain of the Pinafore" would put D'Oyly Carte to shame. And Ann Robinson, whose "Gilbert and Sullivan Blues" would put Mr. W. S. and Sir Arthur in stitches. The ensemble, too, is on the Savoyard side with its "We Sail the Ocean Blue" and other nautical get-togethers.

As a matter of truth-telling, the "Memphis Bound"-ers are at their best when "Pinafore" is responding to their talents. Straight or streamlined, "The Lass Who Loved a Sailor" is well up their alley. I hope they'll do all of it straight some time.

With Pleasure!

Reading what I've written, this is no well-planned review. I guess I'm too pepped up to sit me down and write one. Long before now I should have taken space to tell you that the story of "Memphis Bound" has to do with a showboat en route to Memphis, stranded high and dry on the river bank at Calliboga, Tenn. Melissa Carter wants to put on a show, "an English grand opera" known as "Pinafore."

There're counter-plots and counter counter-plots, with a wayward boatman, a lovelorn lady, some missing money and all that sort of run of the musical comedy mill thing. But "Pinafore's" the pivot.

And when "Pinafore's" the pivot, I don't know when I've known the piece to be so effectively danced, said and sung. Last night, at the Broadway, there were those of us who yearned out loud for more Gilbert and Sullivan in the second stanza, just as there were others of us who preferred the second stanza precisely as it was. I was on the yearning-for-more side. I still am, believe me.

With the hour late, the deadline early, let's carry "Memphis Bound" over to another time. Suffice it, here and now, to say that John Wildberg has done it again, with pleasure. Today Bill Robinson will have a happy, happy birthday. Here's luck, Bojangles. More Gilbert and Sullivan to you.

'MEMPHIS BOUND.'

A new musical comedy, starring Bill Robinson, presented by John Wildberg at the Broadway Theater, May 24, 1945. Lyrics and music by Don Walker and Clay Warnick. Book by Albert Barker and Sally Benson (with gratitude to W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan). Production directed by Robert Ross. Dances by Al White Jr. Scenery designed and lighted by George Jenkins. Costumes designed by Lucinda Ballard. Production under supervision of Vinton Freedley. The cast:

Hector ..... William C. Smith
Melissa Carter (Aunt Mel) ..... Edith Wilson
Chloe ..... Avon Robinson
Roy Barrett ..... Billy Daniels
Mrs. Paradise ..... Ada Brown
Lily Valentine ..... Sheila Guys
Penny Paradise ..... Ida James
Henny Paradise ..... Thelma Carpenter
Mr. Finch ..... Frank Wilson
Winfield Carter (Windy) ..... Avon Long
Pilot Meriwether (Pops) ..... Bill Robinson
Timmy ..... Timothy Grace
Sheriff McDaniels ..... Oscar Plante
Eulalie ..... Joy Merrimore
Sarabelle ..... Harriet Jackson
Bill ..... Charles Welch
Gabriel ..... William Dillard
Cherubs: Georgia Ann Timmons, Marilene Strong, Delta Rhythm Boys . . . , Traverse Crawford, Rose Dee Knight, Carl Jones, Kaley Pharr, Lee Gaines.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

MAY 25, 1945

HMS Pinafore Bound for Memphis With Bill Robinson as the Skipper

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It has been too many years since I have seen a musical with the zip, the stomp and the whoosh of "Memphis Bound," which John Wildberg brought to the Broadway Theatre last night.

Musicals of late have been serious about themselves — sometimes depressingly so. They go in for solemn quaintness, or "book," or ballets that are artistic as all hell. They have slipped away from the days of "Hit the Deck" and "Flying High" and have become works of dignity.

Often they have been pretty wonderful and we get an "Oklahoma" or a "Carousel"—but something has been missing, too. The lacking element might be called breeze. "Memphis Bound" has breeze.

It is a swing version of Gilbert and Sullivan's "H. M. S. Pinafore," for the greater and better part. It is handsomely set, brilliantly costumed, very smartly orchestrated, beautifully sung. Its Negro company is headed by Bill Robinson, Avon Long, Frank Wilson, Sheila Guys, Ada Brown and one of the best of the male quartets, the Delta Rhythm Boys.

Don't Look Too Close.

The best way to look upon "Memphis Bound" is not to consider what funny tricks it has played with Sir Arthur Sullivan's music, or to examine too closely how well it is put together, but to view it as a happy, friendly effort to give you a good time.

If you look too close, you will find flaws. The plot—which is about a Tennessee show boat company giving a performance of "Pinafore" with a little of "Trial by Jury" thrown in—is the least crisp part of the production. Toward the end one doesn't care about it any more—doesn't remember who loves whom or whether Bill Robinson is still in jail.

But, before it begins to get that 10:30 P. M. shadow, the musical has been as good-natured as a puppy and has frequently been very smart. Robinson first did "The Hot Mikado" in the era preceding the Trylon and the Perisphere, and it is heartening now to find him singing "I Am the Ruler of the Queen's Navee" in the Robinson manner.

Robinson Is Timeless.

Bill, now 67, probably will outlast—if he hasn't already—the Time Capsule somebody buried in the Flushing bog when "The Hot Mikado" was playing the Fair. His skin is as darkly glistening as ever, his teeth as white, his smile as comprehensive and his eyes as roguish. His feet still fashion those inimitably clear patterns of taps, and the old, old stair dance has lost none of its capacity to astonish.

Working with Bill are many friendly and able people. Avon Long, who dances with style and speaks his lines with precision, is a brown-skinned Clifton Webb—the Webb of earlier days. Miss Guys is a pretty ingenue and Miss Brown puts a gentle swing into "I'm Called Little Buttercup" which is quite enchanting. The background harmonies of the Delta Rhythm crew are worth special attention.

The chorus can sing, of course; and its dancing has the quality that only Negroes can give it, of looking abandoned and almost sloppy but being very precise.

Don Walker and Clay Warnick have written some of their own songs but I can't think of any except Robinson's "Growing Pains," which he makes amusing. And Walker has done many interesting things with the Sullivan songs, both in vocal and orchestral arrangements. The orchestra, under the direction of Charles Sanford, is big, brassy and fresh, and Mr. Sanford does more than any other one person to give "Memphis Blues" the pace it shows up to the last half hour.

George Jenkin's show boat set and smaller items like Mr. Robinson's hoosegow home are very good, and Lucinda Ballard's costumes are simply swell.

NEW YORK SUN

MAY 25, 1945.

'Memphis Bound,' Musical Comedy, Starring Bill Robinson, Has Premiere.

Bill Robinson came dancing nimbly back into town last night at the head of the big cast of "Memphis Bound," an all-Negro musical comedy, which had its premiere at the Broadway Theater, and that in itself calls for some joyful dancing on the part of Manhattan's playgoers this May morning.

Just before he set his skillful toes to tapping in his final number, he told last night's audience that today would be his sixty-seventh birthday. He carries his years lightly. Many a younger man seated before him would have hesitated to put in the vigorous evening he was just finishing. The lavish and colorful show, which John Wildberg has guided onto the stage of the Broadway with Vinton Freedley supervising, leans heavily on Robinson, and he does not let it down.

"Memphis Bound" developed from what started out to be a swing version of "H. M. S. Pinafore." Now it has acquired a book of its own by Albert Barker and Sally Benson. In the plot they have provided, Aunt Mel Carter seeks to raise funds to get her showboat, the Calliboga Queen, freed from the mudflats onto which Pilot Meriweather (Bill Robinson) had steered her some years before, by staging a performance of the Gilbert and Sullivan classic. When the cast transforms the music into syncopation in the best Harlem style, Aunt Mel rings down the curtain in horror. It takes most of the second act to get "Pinafore" going again. There were times last evening when it seemed that the story was going to lay a heavy hand on the proceedings. Fortunately the plot is neatly kicked aside before any real damage is done. In fact, "Memphis Bound" starts a trifle ponderously, but soon Robinson is explaining tunefully about "Growing Pains" to a winning young cherub, Timothy Grace, and all is well.

The presentation of "Pinafore" to a beat of eight to the bar takes up the latter part of the first act and is easily the high-point of the evening. The most devoted of the Savoyards may shudder to find their beloved tunes jazzed up to the mood of 125th street, but a lot of other folks are going to be delighted by them in their new meter. "I'm Called Little Buttercup" loses none of its melody and acquires a fresh gayety as Ada Brown and the Delta Rhythm boys shift it into jazz, and the "Captain" song proves pleasantly amusing in a new way as Avon Long, lustrous in a purple uniform, informs the world he was "hardly ever" sick at sea. Josephine bewails her lot in triplicate because Mrs. Paradise wouldn't let her daughters, Henny and Penny, be left out of the show, and Billy Daniels brings an excellent tenor voice to his love song to the three girls.

Robinson, of course, is the admiral who rose to head the Navy via some expert polishing, and his singing of the famous "I Am the Ruler" song, abetted by his shuffling feet and his slow smile is a sheer delight. From that he proceeds into his stair dance, as expertly as ever, to the joy of all concerned. Whether tapping his soles to the floorboards, discussing women and funds in escrow with Avon Long is his jail cell, or removing the members of a beer hall qnartet as the leader of a sheriff's posse, he can be a very amusing fellow, and is.

In the second act Sheila Guys, Ida James and Thelma Carpenter stir some chuckles by "Love or Reason" number. The big chorus steps early and often in the best jive fashion and Long does some clever dancing to help along during the evening. Don Walker and Clay Warnick contribute some catchy tunes and lyrics of their own to "Memphis Bound," but the best numbers still are those of Gilbert and Sullivan with the music revamped. Lucinda Ballard has costumed the show gayly and George Jenkins has designed an attractive set for the stranded showboat.

Geared obviously to provide a gay and eye-filling evening for the summer trade, "Memphis Bound" does just that admirably.

HERRICK BROWN.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

MAY 25, 1945.

'Memphis Bound' Fails To Arrive at Port

By Burton Rascoe

In the apt words of Edith Wilson, the Aunt Mel of "Memphis Bound," they beat the brains out of Gilbert & Sullivan with boogie-woogie at the Broadway last night. And the musical comedy tradition itself suffered various abrasions and contusions. There was an all-Negro cast sadly in search of a book; there were such fine vocalists as Ada Brown and the Delta Rhythm Boys with almost nothing to sing; comedy was entirely absent; and for a Negro troupe, the whole ensemble was curiously lacking in zip and zingo.

Of course any entertainment that has Bill (Bojangles) Robinson in it, has the top man in his art; and Bill, who was 67 at midnight last night (so he told us), with the unearthly ease and dexterity of his pedal musicianship, was a tingling thrill whenever he went into a tap, which he did on four all-too-brief occasions, climaxing the first act with his famous stair dance and doing a tintinnabulation of the bells to a musical number called "Ring the Merry Belles" at the close of the show.

Ada Brown Acclaimed.

Avon Long, famous as the Sportin' Life of "Porgy and Bess" has one rhythmic and spectacular dance and two songs (neither of them distinguished) and is rather lost in the shuffle of the incoherent and haphazard confusion of thematic material. Next to Bill Robinson, Ada Brown drew the most applause of the evening with a swing version of "I'm Called Little Buttercup" from "Pinafore," aided by the Delta Rhythm Boys, whose harmonies are wonderful.

This is an expensive production—and looks it. George Jenkins has designed and lighted it with loving care, and Lucinda Ballard has costumed it with cute, colorful and garish fabrics; but even Mr. Jenkins and Miss Ballard were hard put to get any general or over-all mood or pattern out of the hazy incongruities of the scenes, which called for the deck of a show boat, Negro girls in the pantelletes and furbelows of the wealthy whites of plantation days though the time is designated as the present, a jail house, two parody scenes from "Pinafore," a dream trial in a fantastic sort of netherworld, and a street in a Tennessee town.

Nary a Laugh.

All I could get out of the story was that Bill Robinson has taken up permanent residence in jail to avoid Edith Wilson's foreclosing on his engagement to marry her; Miss Wilson is a showboat proprietress who puts on a production of "Pinafore" only to have it foully done in by boogie-woogie local Tennessee talent; Avon Long, Bojangles sporty son, ensnares the heart of Sheila Guys (a very pretty girl, by the way) when her better judgment tells her she should marry Billy Daniels, a steady man; and . . .well that's as much as I could extract from the confusion; but there is finale promptly at 11:15, with some of the loudest noise you ever heard from an orchestra pit.

The music and lyrics (with a nod to Gilbert and Sullivan) are by Don Walker and Clay Warnick but, with the exception of "Things Are Seldom What They Seem," the songs are not very catchy; and the chorus numbers are rather routine swing stuff, orchestrated largely for brasses and tympani by Mr. Walker. There isn't, by the way, a laugh in the show, although Bill Robinson and some very cute Negro children draw pleased smiles and a chuckle or two. One thing you can say about "Memphis Bound," however, is that it is very clean—good-natured, informal and inoffensive.

NEW YORK PM
MAY 25, 1945

'HMS Pinafore' Southern Style

PM Reviews

—Kronenberger—

In *Memphis Bound* the town has another pleasant musical, along with a fairly novel one. Originally conceived as a swing version of *HMS Pinafore*, it has wound up as a Negro musical show with a large slab of *Pinafore* in the center of it. In other words, the old show-within-a-show trick. This is achieved without too much head-scratching by turning the cast into a show boat troupe whose boat has been grounded somewhere near Memphis and who, to raise the cash to set it afloat, put on a performance of *Pinafore*. They put it on with so much jive, swing, boogie-woogie, abandon and irreverence that half way through it the horrified lady impresario rings down the curtain. End of Act I.

The show, particularly in Act II, is a pretty topsy-downsy and haphazard affair whose characters may want to get to Memphis but whose plot doesn't seem to care where it ends up. But despite its great unevenness, the show gives you a nice evening through a combination of very real virtues. The *Pinafore* interlude drips with fun. The show has frequently the special color and excitement—notably in its dancing—of lusty Negro entertainment. It has Bill Robinson, at 67 still tapping and stair-dancing inimitably, still a fetching personality, still a man with a true sense of style. It has the darting and mercurial Avon Long, another man who can dance, another man with an instinct for style. It has Don Walker, who has orchestrated the score superbly. In Sheila Guys, Ida James and Thelma Carpenter it has three winning young ladies. Finally, George Jenkins has done some remarkably good sets and Lucinda Ballard some wonderfully gay and gaudy costumes.

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Before the jive-wire performance of *Pinafore* is given the ax, it succeeds in becoming the high point of the show. Mayhem is committed on Gilbert & Sullivan with the greatest nonchalance, and often with the best of results. The tunes are swung, shagged to and turned on their ear; it almost adds to the fun that some of the voices are slight and one or two even sour. Bill Robinson plays Sir Joseph Porter, Avon Long the captain, and he has not one but three daughters named Josephine.

In Act II things get pretty vague; the plot seems largely a matter of scene-shifting. There is, however, a *Trial By Jury* dream-scene, because—as somebody remarks—*Trial By Jury* is always on the same program as *Pinafore*." I can also state that Bill Robinson keeps himself in jail so as not to marry the dame he has been immemorially "engaged" to; and that Avon Long and Billy Daniels are both courting the same girl.

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What gives all this mulligan stew flavor are enough good specialty numbers. Early in the show Bill Robinson has a nice little ditty called *Growing Pains*; later the three young ladies have a nice one called *Love or Reason*; and half a dozen times the stage, at the drop of a baton, is deep with lively dancers.

With the right cropping and shearing, with a book that made better sense or better nonsense, with a continuously rather than intermittently fast pace, *Memphis Bound* could have been a knockout show. As it stands, it is just a highly agreeable one—but that, for the end of May, is nothing to sniff at.

—Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK
MAY 25, 1945

Gilbert, Sullivan and Boogie

By HOWARD BARNES

FOR the second time in a week, an all-Negro company takes over a stage with "Memphis Bound." The new musical comedy at the Broadway Theater has far more definition than "Blue Holiday." It is still an untidy show. The idea of interpolating "H. M. S. Pinafore" and "Trial by Jury" in boogie-woogie accents is neither novel nor arresting. The surrounding proceedings, as a sepia show-boat company struggles with the Savoy operas, constitute an uneven cafe floor show. When the great Bill Robinson is on stage, it makes little difference that the fragments of the musical are curiously unrelated and discordant. For most of the time "Memphis Bound" is a labored romp.

Bill Robinson is the particular boon of this latest sepia extravaganza. His acting and his singing fall little short of his dancing. In other words, he is miraculously entertaining. As the kleptomaniac fiancee of Aunt Jemima G. & S. impresario on a bend of the Mississippi near Calliboga, Tenn., he breathers what vitality there is into a cumbersome plot. He takes straight comedy, fantasy, or the satirical jibes at "Trial by Jury" in his stride and with captivating humor. As a matter of fact, that old routine of his of tapping up and down over a double set of steps is the high light of the production. There is nothing wrong with "Memphis Bound" when he is on the Broadway stage.

Those who do not like the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas are likely to get some fun out of the lampoons in the Albert Barker-Sally Benson book and the Don Walker-Clad Warnick songs. "The Gilbert and Sullivan Blues," for example, which punctuates the unsuccessful efforts of the show boat company, is a spectacular number. But it does not compare favorably, I suggest, with the originals of the burlesque. The work is at its best when it underlines the melodic felicity of the Sullivan tunes and then hops them up with a bit of off-beat. There are several good performers in addition to Robinson, to work the trick.

Avon Long dances easily and sings acceptably, as the alleged big-time showman who throws a monkey-wrench in a show boat revival. He has the misfortune to be on stage with the star in several scenes. That is the toughest of assignments. Thelma Carpenter contrives some diverting incidental nonsense in several song numbers; Sheila Guys sigs sixty times better than she acts; Billy Daniels and Frank Wilson do their best to help out the supposed continuity and the Delta Rhythm Boys harmonize pleasantly. The George Jenkins settings are befitting a lavish song and dance concoction, while Vinton Freedley has made what he could out of a hodge-podge fram. "Memphis Bound" has good numbers, but they do not hang together in a satisfying whole.

NEW YORK TIMES
MAY 25, 1945.

THE PLAY

By LEWIS NICHOLS

The first of a task force of musicals based on "H. M. S. Pinafore" came to town last evening under the title of "Memphis Bound." As they are firing their first salvo at the Broadway, the syncopated Savoyards pretty much hit the mark. With an all-Negro cast, and with caution thrown casually to the four winds, "Memphis Bound" generally is a cheerful and active show. It has fast dancing, Don Walker's orchestrations to gild the lily of Sir Arthur's music, and last—and not unimportant to the business at hand—Bill Robinson as the star. Probably Gilbert and Sullivan were thinking of Bill when they wrote down the original in the first place.

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Like many another musical, "Memphis Bound" has its ups and downs. A student of letters probably would find difficulty in making complete sense of the book, which has to do with a group of players giving "Pinafore" in order to raise money to get their boat off the mud-bank. There also are times when the show seems a little uncertain of what it shall do next. But the players keep their tempers and grin through the crises, and presently Mr. Robinson and his colleagues are pounding away at jazz for all they are worth. The performance of the abridged "Pinafore," which takes up the greater part of the first act, is the best part of the evening; after that, "Memphis Bound" must worry about its plot.

In getting his music together, Mr. Walker has taken most of the well-known songs of the original and has produced something best described by a lyric to one of the tunes—"'Pinafore,' eight to the bar." Part of the result is boogie-woogie, part is jazz, part even is Sir Arthur, since Mr. Walker knows when to stop. Humor runs through the orchestrations, and a light-hearted, dancing gayety. Since he is a composer as well, Mr. Walker has tossed in a number or two of his own, and they are all right also. When Gilbert is not writing the lyrics, Clay Warnick takes over, and the lyrics go nicely with the music.

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Toward the end of the evening, Mr. Robinson let out a vital statistic: today is his birthday and he is 67 years old. By the way he goes at "Memphis Bound" he must have been the reverse victim of that Gilbert and Sullivan trick having to do with leap year; he obviously is only a fourth of 67. In his new show he is the "monarch of the sea" in the "Pinafore" part, a jailed river man in the remainder. His dancing is the same as always, he still taps up and down the stairs with an agility that would dizzy a grandchild. Easy and light, he wanders casually through "Memphis Bound," singing, talking, tapping.

Avon Long is another member of the cast who knows his way around the stage and has plenty to keep him there, and Billy Daniels and he are rivals for the hand of Josephine. Josephine in this case is a trio—Sheila Guys, Ida James and Thelma Carpenter, who say they are singing something like the Andrews Sisters and are very pretty besides. A large and rapidly moving chorus has been trained by Al White Jr., and while the dances are not complex, they go with the show. George Jenkins has designed some high wide and handsome settings, and Lucinda Ballard has offered brilliant costumes. Albert Baker and Sally Benson contributed the book.

"Memphis Bound"—continued

NEW YORK POST
MAY 25, 1945

'Memphis Bound' Swings Some of 'H. M. S. Pinafore'

By Wilella Waldorf

"Memphis Bound," the new Negro extravaganza presented by John Wildberg and Vinton Freedley last night at the Broadway Theatre, probably started out to be a complete swing version of "H. M. S. Pinafore" after the fashion of "The Swing Mikado" and "The Hot Mikado" that flourished about the time of the World's Fair.

Most of the music is still Sullivan's, though it is doubtful if Sir Arthur would recognize some of it in its current incarnation, while Gilbert's lyrics are sometimes kept intact, but more often adapted or entirely rewritten. Don Walker and Clay Warnick, who performed the operation on the original "Pinafore," have done a very clever and tricky piece of work, but the swung operetta is actually presented for only a part of the first act.

After the intermission, "Memphis Bound" endeavors to develop some sort of plot involving the Negroes of Calliboga, Tennessee, who have been presenting "Pinafore" aboard their showboat Calliboga Queen, and although the music is still Sullivanesque, the spirit seems to go out of things and it's not until just before the finale that the fun starts up again with Bill Robinson celebrating his 67th birthday by singing and dancing an attractive modern arrangement of what used to be "Never Mind the Why and Wherefore."

Admiral Bill Robinson

Mr. Robinson, of course, plays Admiral Porter, K. C. B., in the "Pinafore" excerpt and his famous dance on the steps is as fascinating as ever. Perhaps he really is 67 years old, but it's hard to believe after watching him cavort through "Memphis Bound."

The modernized "Pinafore" is interesting musically and often very funny as presented by the showboaters. Ralph Rackstraw, the lovelorn sailor, is done fairly straight by Billy Daniels, who has a pleasant tenor. Avon Long, playing Captain Corcoran in a lavender uniform, does a mild swish around the deck while his crew waves handkerchiefs, and there are three Josephines. It seems three girls had been promised the part and since they were practicing in the Andrews Sisters tradition, they do it as a sister act.

Unfortunately no uniform pattern seems to have been set for the travesty, which wavers between a Tennessee Negro troupe's conception of how to perform "Pinafore" and a sophisticated Broadway exercise in modern rhythms.

The novelty isn't sufficient to last through the second half of the evening, so "Memphis Bound" tosses in a little bit of everything after the intermission, including even a garbled "Trial By Jury" done with no distinction whatever. The Messrs. Walker and Warnick also fall below standard with their modern versions of the Captain's "Fair Moon" and Josephine's famous aria, "The Hours Creep on Apace . . ." The show as a whole lacks continuity and presents a confused medley of styles.

"Memphis Bound," viewed as a swing version of "Pinafore," is good half the way. Taken purely as a Negro extravaganza, it is a generally colorful and lively show, with Bill Robinson still in wonderful form.

"Foxhole in the Parlor"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

MAY 24, 1945

'Foxhole in the Parlor' Earnestly Considers a Veteran and Peace

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Elsa Shelley is no piker. When she determines to write a play she wants to do more than just write a piece for the stage in which people talk and behave naturally and interestingly, and in which everything comes out nice and even. She wants also to tackle a problem—to jog us into a little thinking.

Last season Miss Shelley made her bow with "Pick-Up Girl," which was a well-documented and pretty good drama about juvenile delinquency. Last night at the Booth Theatre—with the help of Producer Harry Bloomfield and Director John Haggott—she gave us "Foxhole in the Parlor," which is not only an interesting play about what to do for a psycho-neurotic ex-soldier but also a very earnest groping for a peace for all time to come.

When the people of Miss Shelley's drama are talking and behaving naturally "Foxhole in the Parlor" is highly interesting; but when she is forced to maneuver her plot so that a period can somehow be put to the evening, she is more than a little at a loss. And no wonder! What she wants, and we all want, and what she was trying to move her play toward, is the magic formula for an everlasting peace.

Everybody Wants Peace.

She wants it, and so does her spokesman in the play, the "psycho" ex-soldier, and so do the people who are trying so kindly to help him over the bumps. But the soldier doesn't know, exactly, and neither do his friends. The conclusion of "Foxhole in the Parlor" is inescapably elusive, and Miss Shelley therefore has to use an old, familiar trick with which to bring down the curtain. The trick—having the hero begin to play the piano in a surge of spiritual release—is not as honest as all that has gone before.

Montgomery Clift, who was impressive as the embittered young casualty in Lillian Hellman's "The Searching Wind," gives an appealing, sensitive and well-schooled performance as Miss Shelley's problem boy.

He is a musician home from the war — home from three horrible battlefield experiences and home from a long stretch in hospital. When he returns to his house in Greenwich Village and sees his friends in the house next door he is jumpy, mentally and physically.

When his friends—a cover-girl artist and his wife, both intelligent and decent—try to make him forget the war he does not want to forget it. Nor does he want them to forget it. When they say he has done his part he replies he hasn't begun—that his work won't be finished until he has told the peacemakers what to do.

Gropes for the Answers.

What the peacemakers should do is in the back of his head, but he can't get it out. He gropes for a message a dying pal gave him. He finds some of what he's trying to say in the Bible, some in the ritual of the Passover. He wants so much to tell it to a senator who is bound for the San Francisco conference.

All but one of those trying to help him is sympathetic. The exception is a sister, sharp and insensitive, who looks upon him not as an ex-soldier but as an ex-lunatic who might at any time return to madness. With this character I think Miss Shelley convincingly shows what not to do to any returned service man.

The players are uniformly good —Russell Hardie as the artist, Flora Campbell as the wife, Raymond Greenleaf as the senator, Grace Coppin as the sister, Ann Lincoln as a pretty model who gives the boy some desperately needed love, Reginald Beane as a colored servant.

Lee Simonson's set—the rooms of two houses with an areaway between—is mechanically interesting and effective. Mr. Haggott, the director, has kept everybody at a quiet, human pitch.

'FOXHOLE IN THE PARLOR.'

A new play by Elsa Shelley, presented by Harry Bloomfield at the Booth Theater May 23, 1945. Directed by John Haggott. Setting designed by Lee Simonson. The cast:

Leroy	Reginald Beane
Tom Austen	Russell Hardie
Vicki King	Ann Lincoln
Ann Austen	Flora Campbell
Senator Bowen	Raymond Greenleaf
Dennis Patterson	Montgomery Clift
Kate Mitchell	Grace Coppin

NEW YORK SUN
MAY 24, 1945.

'Foxhole in the Parlor,' by Elsa Shelley Has Premiere at Booth Theater.

A year ago in her first play, "Pick-Up Girl," Elsa Shelley was telling with dramatic fervor of juvenile delinquency. Now it is the returning war veteran and the post-war world that has her attention in "Foxhole in the Parlor," which Harry Bloomfield brought into the Booth Theater last evening. She devised the better play when she was dealing with a children's court.

That's a pity too, for what she is striving to say in "Foxhole in the Parlor" about a lasting peace is something she feels deeply—her special program message to her first-night audience showed that—and it's well worth the saying. In execution, however, she displays more zeal than sound dramatic writing.

Her present story is of Dennis Patterson, a young musician from Greenwich Village, who has come home in this spring of '45 from the foxholes of North Africa and Europe, with his nerves shattered, but his soul aflame that the buddy who was blown into eternity at his side one night in Belgium shall not have died in vain. How an understanding couple across the court, an artist and his wife, seek to ease their returning friend back into normal living on the first week end after his release from the psychoneurotic ward of a military hospital and at the same time save him from the stupid blundering of his narrow-minded and iron willed sister from the hop fields of Oregon—Miss Shelley stacks her cards here—affords the major share of the drama in the play.

In her plot her peace theme gets a lift through the sudden visit to Manhattan by the father of the artist's wife, an ex-Senator bound for San Francisco, but the conference angle, unfortunately, leads "Foxhole in the Parlor" into the worst of its occasional blind alleys of talkiness.

One high hurdle that Miss Shelley has set for herself is her method of presentation. Young Patterson and his neighbors, the Austens, live in one of those charming little groups of courtyard houses which the byways of the Village afford, and the scene she has chosen includes the Patterson and Austen living rooms with a bit of the pathway between their houses. Lee Simonson's setting is attractively devised, with its glimpse into the two homes, but the necessity of having first one room, then the other, swung into the spotlight is awkward in itself, breaking both the mood and continuity of the play badly at times. Furthermore, it leaves part of the audience cut off from some of the players in the middle of a scene.

There is nothing wrong with the acting, however. Montgomery Clift is again cast as a boy home from the front and his portrayal of Miss Shelley's tortured hero is one of the best performances at present to be found in town. He keeps an excellent rein on the role throughout and at the same time reveals vividly the lad's agony of spirit. Russell Hardie and Flora Campbell make the friendly neighbors completely natural. Ann Lincoln is appealing as a model who falls in love with the ex-warrior, and Grace Coppin keeps the sister harsh. The politician seeking a balance between idealism and practicality is given a good earthy touch by Raymond Greenleaf and Reginald Beane as Leroy could easily be the house boy next door.

Miss Shelley proved in "Pick-Up Girl" that she writes truthfully and bluntly in the current idiom. She pulls no punches in "Foxhole in the Parlor" either. Despite faltering stretches, it includes several scenes of depth, and one of its best is its effective final curtain.

List "Foxhole in the Parlor" as grim, too frequently fumbling for its own good, but moving and provocative at moments, too. At least, it again stamps Miss Shelley as a playwright worth watching.

HERRICK BROWN.

NEW YORK TIMES
MAY 24, 1945.

Soldier's Voice

By LEWIS NICHOLS

In writing "Foxhole in the Parlor," Elsa Shelley's intentions obviously were of the highest. She set out to express in terms of the theatre the universal demand that there be no more wars, and for that she deserves all possible credit. The expression, however, is not on the same plane as the sentiment. Despite its subject and an excellent bit of playing by Montgomery Clift in the leading role, Miss Shelley's drama is languid and depetitious. At the end of the evening, "Foxhole in the Parlor" emerges as only another promise which a playwright has failed to fulfill.

* * *

Miss Shelley's main character is a young musician who has joined the army, has seen his companions killed and finally cracks under the strain. He is discharged from the service and returns to his Greenwhich Village house, where his neighbors, realizing he is not yet well, think he should be treated normally. He, himself, wishes to get before the San Francisco Conference a message from his dead fellows saying there must be no more wars, and he tries to tell that to a former Senator bound for the meeting. His sister, thinking him insane, tries to get him committed before the Senator, finding truth in the message, takes him along to the conference.

Miss Shelley's basic premise that war should cease is not arguable, but in her play she offers no platform about how it is to be done. By making a psychoneurotic of her leading character she has built up pity for an individual without being able to persuade an audience that he would be able to help end wars once he reached the conference. In addition to being talkative, "Foxhole in the Parlor" also sometimes stoops to such passages of writing as "You're like a drink of spring water to a man with a fever." Finally, Miss Shelly bears down too heavily on some of her characters and not heavily enough on others. The sister, for example, is such a harsh, cold person that she becomes a full caricature; and the young girl in the case seems to be on the stage mainly because every play is better off for a young girl.

* * *

With Mr. Clift's portrayal of the soldier there can be no complaint. He has an intensity of action and speech which goes exactly with a sensitive man who had seen too much and must tell others. Russell Hardie and Flora Campbell are the neighbors, the latter's role being one of those which are underdrawn. The girl—a model working for the artist neighbor—is played by Ann Lincoln; the Senator by Raymond Greenleaf. For "Foxhole in the Parlor" Lee Simonson has designed one of the season's most attractive settings. It shows the living rooms of two houses, with court between, and the setting moves back and forth with the action. But, curiously enough, the magnificence of the background points up the weakness of the play; the setting clearly deserves more than it gets at the end of its travels.

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
MAY 24, 1945

A "Near-Miss"

By HOWARD BARNES

THERE is so much emotional instancy in "Fox-hole in the Parlor" that it might have been a fine and stirring dramatic production. Elsa Shelley has written of a shocked and battle-weary veteran in her new play at the Booth Theater. Montgomery Clift plays the part with superb authority and understanding. Since the theme and the central performance constantly transcend the writing and the craftsmanship, it is only possible to report that the work is doubly disappointing. There are moments in this Harry Bloomfield offering which are instinct with beauty and meaning. They are dissipated in wordy obscurantism.

* * *

For the author has taken obvious subject matter and woven it into an annoyingly prosaic pattern. No matter how much one may be moved by the portrait of a soldier, back from horror and incapable of making an immediate readjustment to civilian living, there is no dramatic spring in "Foxhole in the Parlor" to sustain mood or thesis. Before the piece is finished it goes off in so many directions at once, that it is difficult to say whether it is a reaffirmation of the tires of Passover or a plea for clandestine love-making.

* * *

Certainly whatever Miss Shelley had in mind is brilliantly illuminated by Clift. This young actor has given several outstanding performances in the past. He has never given so fine a one against such staggering odds. On more than one occasion, he picks up a situation, as it were, by the bootstraps, making it ring with an eloquence which is not there in the writing. His portrayal of a fighter discharged from an Army hospital for mental cases is something to witness. Not so the play.

* * *

Grace Chopin gives him his best support in the role of a small-town sister, who keeps reminding him that he is acting like a lunatic, instead of helping him make his peace with a sorry world. Raymond Greenleaf is good, as an ex-Senator, importuned by the kid to make a good and lasting peace, and so is Ann Lincoln as a tramp model who really loves him. As for Russell Hardie and Flora Campbell, playing an artist, and his wife who try to get the veteran back on balance, they are only faintly credible. There is little enough of credible make-believe in "Foxhole in the Parlor," including the whirling sets of Lee Simonson. The idea of the play warrants dramatic celebration. It has not been done at the Booth.

New York Journal-American

May 24, 1945

'Foxhole in the Parlor' Opens at the Booth

By ROBERT GARLAND

Along with me, Elsa Shelley isn't at all sure she makes her fundamental intentions as clear as they should be in "Foxhole in the Parlor," her new drama-with-a-message which Harry Bloomfield brought last night to the Booth Theatre. So, in an earnest effort to clarify the situation, she prints an extra-mural explanation on the program covers distributed in 45th st., hard by Shubert Alley.

Miss Shelley, it seems, once asked a psychiatrist at an Army hospital what, in his opinion, was the most general specific cause for the emotional and mental breakdown of men in combat. The psychiatrist said it was "the insult to the spirit."

By which is meant that the body accommodates itself to the beastly existence of a fox in a hole, while the spirit rebels. But the spirit of all mankind is now aflame with resentment at the insult war has hurled against it. People everywhere are demanding that there be no more wars, ever. But the flame dies and the people forget. Therein lies the danger. So insists our dramatist!

The flame of rebellion against war must be kept alive in the heart of every one of us. Our appointed peacemakers at the conferences must build the foundation for permanent peace and we at home must keep reminding them of this. Thus speaks Elsa Shelley.

* * *

Message To Frisco

And so speaks Dennis Patterson, unhappy hero of Miss Shelley's latest play. Back from the foxholes overseas, re-established in the Greenwich Village cottage Lee Simonson designed for him, Dennis is bewitched by the past, bewildered over the present, bothered about the future. Not only his own past, present and future. But the past, present and future of this earth and those who remain alive thereon.

Having neighbors, good, close, healthy-minded neighbors, he discusses the state of the world with them. And with a United States Senator who drops in and out of Mr. and Mrs. Austen's—Tom and Ann—adjacent domicile. He, at least, should do something definite about it.

For he's going to the Peace Conference, is Sen. Bowen. But the gentleman from Washington isn't at all certain what he's going to do—or say or think, for those matters—when he arrives in San Francisco. On the other hand, the bewitched, bewildered and bothered boy, fresh from the fighting and the foxholes, is. The gentleman from Washington is going to see to it that there will never be another war.

Dennis Patterson will deliver a message to Sen. Bowen, a message which, in turn, Sen. Bowen will deliver to the knights of the San Francisco Round Table. It is a Christ-like Sermon on the Mount, urging "peace on earth and the brotherhood of man."

* * *

Lacks Lucidity

If all this, and not much more, sounds somewhat vague when printed in black and white in a newspaper, it sounds somewhat vaguer when spoken out loud upon the stage of the Booth Theatre. There's not the shadow of a doubt that Miss Shelley's Dennis Patterson, along with Miss Shelley herself, has the highest possible intentions. So have we all! But what to do with them is not made clear.

Meeting the idea halfway, it isn't easy to believe that the snatches of peace propaganda our unhappy hero writes down, that the scraps of peace propaganda our unbalanced hero clips from various passive publications, will pass a San Francisco miracle.

Montgomery Clift, recently of "The Searching Wind," is as touching as he is terrifying in the role of the returned soldier with a Messianic complex gleaming with abnormal brightness in his war-weary eyes. Broadway knows no finer piece of underplaying. Russell Hardie and Flora Campbell are sane and likeable as Dennis' would-be helpful fellow Greenwich Villagers, Reginald Beane, as Leroy, is a kindly colored man.

Lee Simonson's distracting background is even less helpful to "Foxhole in the Parlor" than is the diffuse direction of John Haggott. But, even so, Miss Shelley's latest on-stage exhibit is as timely as tomorrow's headlines, as sincere as Winston Churchill's resignation, as thought-provoking as any play in town. But it lacks lucidity!

NEW YORK

WORLD-TELEGRAM

MAY 24, 1945.

Foxhole in the Parlor' Subtle, Exciting, Touching

By Burton Rascoe

Elsa Shelley, whose "Foxhole in the Parlor" was flawlessly presented by Harry Bloomfield at the Booth last night, with only two plays to her credit, is already emerging as one of our most important playwrights. Her first play, "Pick-Up Girl," was rightly chosen by Burns Mantle last year for inclusion in his volume of the 10 best plays of the season 1943-'44. Likewise her "Foxhole in the Parlor" belongs on any well-chosen list of the season's bests. It is a subtle, exciting and touching drama, beautifully played by a perfect cast under the skillful direction of John Haggott.

The press releases on "Foxhole in the Parlor" were misleading—at least to me. I got the impression that it was a topical play having something to do with the world security conference in San Francisco, and I feared the worst. It does have vaguely to do with the San Francisco conference but in about the same way that "Othello" has to do with a war of the Venetians against the Turks. The drama, however, has to do with a sort of Hamlet-like veteran of the present war—a type of which we had many thousands after the last war and of which we shall have even more after this one.

Young Actor Brilliant.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Miss Shelley has taken up the theme of the scene which had the most dramatic impact in "The Searching Wind"—the one in which the crippled and distracted youngster strikes out against his parents and against all of their generation in the agony of his reflections upon all the waste of youth in war and against the failure of his elders to prevent such waste. . . . And, for the leading role in "Foxhole in the Parlor" Mr. Bloomfield has cast the brilliant young actor, Montgomery Clift, who scored such a triumph in that scene. Mr. Clift has shown he can carry a whole play with the feeling and conviction he gave to a minor role in "The Searching Wind."

Dennis (Mr. Clift) has received his medical discharge when the play opens. He returns to the little studio in Greenwich Village where he had studied to become a concert pianist before he enlisted. He is reluctant to take up with his old friends, a commercial artist and his wife—or, indeed, with anybody, because he has been in the psychoneurotic hospital and is tortured by the fear that he may be deranged.

Message from Dead.

A cold, unfeeling, "normal" and very efficient sister (Grace Coppin) who has always been antipathetic to his artistic ambitions comes to have him committed to an asylum and to harass him meanwhile—especially when he tries to be articulate about what all sensitive youngsters who have been through the horrors of war must feel—that something must be done to make sure it shall not happen again.

When he has finally written out his message—from the heroic dead—that he wants a delegate to the security conference to deliver, he is cured of his neurosis; he can play the piano again; his hope is restored.

Problem Well Presented.

As in "Pick-Up Girl," Miss Shelley has been a conscientious artist, content to present a problem, a situation, in dramatically emotional terms; she has not attempted to give a facile solution. The boy's neurosis is a natural product of his sensitivity; it follows a common war psychosis pattern, compact of frustration and a sense of loneliness. The subtlest touches in the drama have to do with the artist's wife and the artist's model in relation to the boy; both fall maternally in love with him, drawn by a spiritual pull they do not understand.

The whole cast is so good that it is almost invidious to bestow special honors on Mr. Clift and Miss Coppin, as the insensitive sister. The ingenious double set, which moves back and forth across the stage as the scene shifts from one studio to the other, is one of the most effective ones Lee Simonson ever designed. The play is altogether a richly rewarding one.

NEW YORK POST
MAY 24, 1945

'Foxhole in the Parlor' Never Gets Below the Surface

By Wilella Waldorf

Elsa Shelley is a theatrical opportunist. Last season at the height of the disturbance over juvenile delinquency, she amassed an alarming collection of court records and proceeded to compile a case history called "Pick-Up Girl" which Michael Todd's staff produced, with some astute embellishments, and called a play.

Now that the public is profoundly interested, and somewhat perturbed, over the readjustment of psycho-neurotic soldiers to civilian life, Miss Shelley has done some research among psychiatrists at Army hospitals and emerged with "Foxhole in the Parlor," produced by Harry Bloomfield last night at the Booth Theatre.

Miss Shelley's latest dramatic effort has not the advantage of taking place in a courtroom, with regulation legal procedure to back it up. It is probable that she has used a case history, or perhaps a combination of several case histories, in creating the confused and distraught ex-service man in "Foxhole in the Parlor," but as a playwright she is, unfortunately, as confused and distraught as he is, with the result that her new play is a well-meaning but hopelessly clumsy and inarticulate plea for understanding of the returned soldier and his problems, and for a lasting peace.

After floundering helplessly in a flood of earnest but muddled talk about the horrors of the battlefield and the need for international amity, Miss Shelley's frenzied young soldier blurts out the dictum that there must never be any more war, ever. She gets no deeper than that herself, although an ex-United States Senator en route to the San Francisco Conference is introduced to give an even more up-to-the-minute touch to the situation, and some resounding platitudes that almost everybody would like to believe in are mouthed once again to very little purpose and with a minimum of dramatic effect.

Montgomery Clift Good

Despite the fact that young Montgomery Clift gives a moving performance as the young pianist who returns from the foxholes a profoundly disturbed and maladjusted young man bent upon preaching the gospel that it must never happen again, the production at the Booth is far from helpful to a script that needs everything the technicians can do for it.

Lee Simonson's set is a dual affair showing a room in each of two adjoining houses in Greenwich Village, one occupied by a successful magazine cover artist and his wife, the other by the returned soldier. Between is a stretch of lawn with a bench and the beginnings of a garden, and the whole contraption shuttles back and forth throughout the evening. As a result part of the audience is always more or less in the dark as to what is going on in the house on the far side of the stage, and John Haggott, the director, is forced to huddle his actors in uncomfortable little groups as far front as possible in order to bring what action there is within range of as many people as possible.

Since Miss Shelley's writing is often downright inept, and her characterization haphazard and unreal, the company is generally at a disadvantage. There are a few sharp, incisive lines here and there and now and then an amusing remark, but on the whole the impression is one of incongruity and shallow thinking.

The theme is lofty but the play is weak.

NEW YORK PM
MAY 24, 1945.

Well Intended, Ill Contrived

PM Reviews

—Kronenberger

In *Foxhole in the Parlor*, as in last season's *Pick-Up Girl*, Elsa Shelley reveals herself as an earnest, well-intentioned, social-minded writer. But all that can be said of her new play itself is that in it a lot of good intentions have gone miserably, hopelessly astray. Miss Shelley has tackled two subjects of great importance; but by trying to mesh them she has let them cancel each other out. At the same time, in her anxiety to act as propagandist for them both, she has altogether forgotten to be a playwright. There is even less drama in her play than there is solidity, and even more diffuseness than there is confusion.

Foxhole in the Parlor is concerned with a soldier who, after going through hell in the war, suffered a severe mental breakdown. When we meet him, he has been sufficiently cured to be sent home from an army hospital. The less arid part of the play has to with the problem of his readjustment; with his own behavior; with his friends, who are understanding; and with his sister, who is utterly insensitive. Thanks to Montgomery Clift's fine performance as the soldier, this side of *Foxhole* has a fitful psychological interest; but it fails as a problem play about the psychoneurotic veteran because, among other things, it insists equally on being a propaganda play about world peace. The soldier is obsessed with the need for peace without having found the formula. He can only take refuge in mysticism and exhortation, and appeal to a senator bound for the San Francisco Conference with an equal desire for peace and an almost equal lack of program.

World peace, however fervently desired, is much too big and knotty a matter to be blueprinted in the theater—let alone in a play already saddled with the enormous problem of the mentally harassed veteran. Miss Shelley, furthermore, offers no blueprint; she is as vague about world peace as she is insistent. Worse still, in terms of theater, her preaching hasn't the slightest emotional impact; everywhere eludes the heart as well as the head; is merely very repetitious talk. The entire play lacks leverage and movement; except as Mr. Clift brings the soldier to life from time to time by his acting, *Foxhole* is static, stammering, chaotic.

Mr. Clift's performance deserves a far better play; and Grace Coppin manages to get something into the role of the sister. The others in the cast are pretty much condemned by their roles. To encompass the action, which takes place in two adjoining houses, Lee Simonson has designed an effective movable set.—Louis Kronenberger

"Round Trip"

NEW YORK PM
MAY 30, 1945

Even One Way Is Too Much

PM Reviews

—Kronenberger

Round Trip is the third play by Miss Orr and Mr. Denham that I have been totally unable to appreciate. In it, to be both brief and blunt, vulgarity runs a race with tedium that ends up in a photo-finish. Act follows act in a mounting mass of heavily underlined and quite unamusing smut; and in a dwindling ability to keep you even mildly interested. I must confess that it requires a certain real ingenuity to think up quite as many ways of being suggestive as *Round Trip* manages to do, right down to the final curtain. But the final curtain remains, for all that, a very welcome moment.

The plot of the play is in itself a standby for comedy. A silly smalltown matron is given a whirl by an actor who has come on from New York to direct some local theatricals; what she fails to realize is that it's not her charms that interest him, but her pocketbook. After a scene with her husband, she follows the actor to New York. Between the actor's girl, whom she finds on the premises, and the lady's husband, who hurries after her from Ohio, there are soon plenty of complications, which are finally straightened out back at the old homestead.

Whether, at this late date, such goings-on could be made amusing, I can't say; but here they most assuredly are not. The authors seem to think sex is so surefire that there's no need to try to raise a laugh on any other subject; not any need, in fact, to make any of the characters likeable.

'ROUND TRIP.'

A new comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham presented by Clifford Hayman at the Biltmore Theater Tuesday, May 29, 1945. Staged by Mr. Denham. Settings by Samuel Leve. Clothes by Bianca Stroock. The cast:

Edgar Albright	Sidney Blackmer
Virginia Albright	Patricia Kirkland
Donald McDermott	Paul Martin
Sarah Albright	June Walker
Jane Daniels	Edith Meiser
Clive Delafield	Eddie Nugent
Griselda	Angela Jaye
Tommy Rollo	Robert Woodburn
Linda Marble	Phyllis Brooks
Hortense	Viola Dean
Jack Admirall	Edward Rowley
Lloyd Wilde	Morton L. Stevens

June Walker, Sidney Blackmer, Eddie Nugent and the rest of the cast do—if nothing more—their duty by the play, but it's not enough.

—Louis Kronenberger

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
MAY 30, 1945

Summer Must Be Here at Last Because 'Round Trip' Has Opened

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The only trouble with Summer is that you get Summer plays. A fine balmy night it was last night—so, kerblip, the Biltmore Theatre got a desperate little farce-comedy called "Round Trip." I sweated it out for two acts and then bumped myself off, being unwilling to accompany Sidney Blackmer and June Walker on their return journey to Ironville, Ohio.

The play is the work of Mary Orr and Reginald Denham, who, two seasons ago, came out with a sex gag called "Wallflower" which made some money. In "Round Trip" they tell the story about the small town matron who gets stage struck. The story is all right, being an ancient favorite, but they tell it badly.

Now and then the authors do have an interesting moment or an amusingly phrased line—but now and then isn't nearly often enough in a tough racket like the Broadway stage. The best scene I saw was where Mr. Blackmer, a gentle and patient husband, tells his wife — Miss Walker—how much she has bored him during 16 of their 18 years of marriage.

It's Love, Love, Love.

Well, this wife in Ironville is acting in a bond or charity show and the show is being directed by a slick New York actor and the actor makes passes at the wife because he hopes to can steam her into backing a play. He doesn't mean the passes because he is honorably attached to a blonde mistress in New York, but the wife thinks he does and follows him to the big city.

Husband follows wife. She may be a bore but he loves her. Last time I saw him he was getting ready to take her home. Up to then people had been talking mostly about bed—and, being very sensitive to autosuggestion, I got sleepy.

Mr. Blackmer comes off best with his role because it is fairly sanely written and he acts it sanely. Miss Walker does her gallant best with what she's got but not even Miss Walker can make much of it. Eddie Nugent tries awfully hard as the actor—but it's no fun to watch anybody try hard. Phyllis Brooks plays the blonde mistress and she's a pretty blonde.

NEW YORK POST
MAY 31, 1945

'Round Trip' Is Unnecessary Travel, Wartime or Any Time

By Wilella Waldorf

Mary Orr and Reginald Denham have dragged out a depressing array of aged comedy stencils in "Round Trip," which opened at the Biltmore Tuesday night.

In itself, that is no crime. Plenty of good comedies are based on all-too-familiar situations. It's up to the authors to handle the worn-out material with sufficient skill and originality to make an audience forget that what it is seeing is strictly old stuff.

Miss Orr and Mr. Denham dig up the one about the silly wife of an Ohio business man who succumbs to the love making and flattery of a visiting New York actor in need of backing for a new play. After a fight with her easy-going husband, she flees to the big city to live the full, free life of an artiste, and discovers the actor in one of those sleazy side-street hotels with a good looking blonde he says is his sister.

It is surely unnecessary to add that the deserted husband hastens after her, is finally convinced of the worst and takes the blonde back to Ohio with him as his secretary. The third act is devoted to an extensive discussion of the various grounds for divorce, and reaches its nadir in a hair-pulling and wrestling match between the two women with the family lawyer acting as referee.

Having exhumed a decayed plot from some mildewed theatrical warehouse, the authors proceed to belabor it so tastelessly and so tediously that "Round Trip" may be set down among the least diverting offerings of the season.

Since Mr. Denham, one of the authors, directed the proceedings, he may presumably be accused of some very peculiar casting in two major roles. June Walker, exuding bustle and efficiency, is called upon to play the reckless wife, a part apparently designed for a fluffy creature of the Billie Burke school, while Sidney Blackmer, the soul of old Southern chivalry, appears as the solid, reliable, Ohio business man. He sounds about as Middle Western as an Ol' Ca'lina cunnel.

Both Miss Walker and Mr. Blackmer are experienced players and it takes more than "Round Trip" to throw them completely off stride. Nevertheless, both seem to have ventured into the wrong play.

Young Patricia Kirkland does well as one of those insufferably sophisticated seventeen-year-olds. Phyllis Brooks is attractive as the blonde from Broadway, while Eddie Nugent seems stiffish and a bit uncomfortable as the actor seeking a backer for a new play. And no wonder. Obviously it isn't necessary to go to such extremes to secure backers for new plays nowadays. Consider "Round Trip."

NEW YORK SUN
MAY 31, 1945

'Round Trip,' Trite Comedy by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham, Has Premiere.

Having taken a brief and unrewarding melodramatic excursion into the wilds of Florida last winter in "Dark Hammock," Mary Orr and Reginald Denham have returned to Ironville, Ohio, the locale of their successful farce, "Wallflower," for their latest offering, "Round Trip," which had its premiere on the stage of the Biltmore Theater Tuesday evening under the flag of Clifford Hayman.

To celebrate their homecoming to their fictional city, they have whipped up a highly synthetic comedy concoction, which generates more sound and fury than hilarity.

In their latest fable they are writing of the Albrights, Edgar and Mary, whose marriage is fast approaching the nineteen-year mark. Bored by her small-town existence as the wife of a prosperous manufacturer of vacuum cleaners, Sarah is indulging herself in this May of 1945 with a whirl in amateur dramatics. To direct her women's club show, Clive Delafield, a bit actor badly in need of funds, has breezed in from Broadway. When he dazzles her with flattery both as to her beauty and her non-existent ability as an actress in order to win her backing for a play in which he is interested, she takes all he says as gospel and follows him to Manhattan.

Before she is safely re-established in Ironville, the triangle has been built into a rectangle via the actor's light of love in New York, and there has been a very gaudy exhibition of feminine hair pulling and swift kicks. For a few moments near the close of the first act, "Round Trip" shows promise of engendering some continuous mirth, but then it lapses once more into a string of cliches in the vein of bedroom farce and mediocre gag lines in which double entendres abound.

Sidney Blackmer makes the Ohio magnate plausible and likable throughout and when an occasional good line falls his way gets the most out of it always. June Walker is an excellent Sarah, as flighty and shallow as the authors made her. As the Albrights' precocious and amorous 17-year-old daughter, Patricia Kirkland demonstrates once more that she knows her way around a stage, and Eddie Nugent and Phyllis Brooks are a good Broadway pair. Most of the other characters are written as caricatures and played the same way.

There are some laughs in "Round Trip," and some others in the first-night audience encountered them more frequently than I did. There aren't enough at best, however, to while away amusingly even a summer's evening.

HERRICK BROWN.

NEW YORK TIMES
MAY 30, 1945

All Change

By LEWIS NICHOLS

If writing a bad play is an art, Mary Orr and Reginald Denham have used an almost superhuman finesse in turning out "Round Trip." To say that it is a bore is to praise it, for its less endearing qualities also include vulgarity, an elephantine groping for double entendre and the use of every smirking cliche on the market. A group of actors and actresses with reputable names somehow got into it, and they at least lasted out the first evening at the Biltmore; some members of the audience did not. The theatre season seems to be drawing to its close with a shudder and noise too soon.

Miss Orr and Mr. Denham are using that plot about the misunderstood Midwestern wife who thinks she is in love with an actor and follows him to New York. He is living with a blonde, and fancy the to-do when those two ladies get together! Fancy also the business when the husband comes to take his wife home and, after palaver, takes the blonde instead. It all comes out all right in the end, of course, with husband and wife reunited in Ohio, actor and blonde reunited in sin and Miss Orr and Mr. Denham getting off scot free—it is to be hoped to write a better play. June Walker and Sidney Blackmer tug and pull at the leading roles; Phyllis Brooks and Eddie Nugent do ditto at the secondary roles and Patricia Kirkland, who can be nice in the real, legitimate theatre, should be spanked and put to bed for her part as the daughter of the family. "Round Trip" is quite awful.

NEW YORK
HERALD TRIBUNE
MAY 31, 1945

Vernal Mishap

By HOWARD BARNES

THE clothes by Bianca Stroock are not overly outrageous in "Round Trip." That is about the best that can be said for this vernal mishap at the Biltmore Theater. The writing, the acting, the staging and even the scenic investiture of the new comedy by May Orr and Reginald Denham are all on a level, and it is lower than this reviewer cares to recollect for long. Unctuously suggestive and halting in execution, the show is not even good for leering laughter.

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Since the authors of the piece are no newcomers to stage shenanigans, one may only suppose that they figured that theatergoers were suckers at this particular moment. Their earlier collaboration, "Wallflower," was no ball of fire, but it was a piece of ineffable artistry compared to this latest concoction. "Round Trip" does not even pretend to have a coherent plot and interrelated situations. It merely makes capital of a flighty and frustrated Mid-Western matron and a Broadway shill who tries to clip her for a bankroll. The net result is way in the red.

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The performers who struggle through the inanities and innuendoes of the production probably deserve sympathy. They will receive little of mine. June Walker, in the role of a stage-struck dowager, does almost nothing to make the piece engaging. On the contrary, she accentuates its lack of taste and perception as she gives a double-take to a line about a roll in the alfalfa. Sidney Blackmer is somewhat better as the big industrialist husband who makes a round trip on his own account to defeat the Broadway shyster's schemes.

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As for the others in the company—Phyllis Brooks is as mannered as she is comely; Patricia Kirkland shows no more histrionic ability than a knack for necking on a sofa and Eddie Nugent is generally bewildered by the proceedings. "Round Trip" is not really bewildering. It is merely deadly dull. Samuel Leve has given the players an extra hazard by making them crawl under stairs to get off stage and Denham has staged the piece in all its flagrant awfulness. The Stroock clothes may be all right in "Round Trip," but they do not make the Biltmore offering all right.

New York Journal-American
May 31, 1945

'Round Trip' Arrives At Biltmore Theatre

By ROBERT GARLAND

TUESDAY NIGHT: I just can't believe it. I just can't believe it in spite of the fact that a child at school, studying to be a half-wit, could walk right up and tell me. June Walker, admirable acting friend of mine, and Sidney Blackmer, another admirable acting friend of mine, can't pull a "Round Trip" on me. Neither, for that matter, can Jack Kirkland's daughter, Patricia. I'll bet take it. Neither will you, I fancy.

When I report that "Round Trip" is too bad to be true, that is exactly what I mean. "Round Trip" is too bad to be true. Playwrights Mary Orr and Reginald Denham seem to work on the Owen Davis theory that one bad play deserves another. First there was "Wallflower." Then there was "Dark Hammock." And now, if you put your hat on and hurry to W. 47th st., there's the little nothing current at the Biltmore.

The little nothing current at the Biltmore is a faint and smudgy carbon copy of the wheezy legend of the small-town wife who sets out to make her small-town husband jealous. And the small-town husband who turns the tables on her. This time, the small-town wife is a would-be actress, while the small-town husband has something to do with vacuum cleaners. The other man and the other woman are a ham director and his girl friend.

In its most recent retelling, tonight's retelling in 47th st., this ofttimes told tale is as tasteless as it is tiresome, as dirty as it is dull. And my admirable acting friend, Sidney Blackmer, is the only member of the cast who doesn't project it with a leer. Because he doesn't, Sidney might do worse than present his play, his playwrights and his fellow players with one of the vacuum cleaners he sells up on the stage...

There's nothing like them for straightening up a mess, says he.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
MAY 31, 1945

'Round Trip' Follows a Monotonous Route

By Burton Rascoe

A faint mephitic miasma descended upon the Biltmore on Tuesday night as the result of a crudely contrived gas bomb, called "Round Trip," tossed upon the stage, with urchin-like disregard for audience comfort, by Mary Orr and Reginald Denham.

Some of us were made particularly unhappy by the sight of such proficient and likable players as June Walker, Sidney Blackmer, Patricia Kirkland, Phyllis Brooks and Eddie Nugent, groping their ways doggedly but uncertainly through the noxious fumes of lines and situations.

As the curtain goes up, pretty little Miss Kirkland is disclosed on a couch, locked in a petting embrace by a youngster in soldier's uniform. This scene is interrupted by the girl's father (Mr. Blackmer), who apologizes for the intrusion, mistaking, by name, the youngster for one whom he had similarly inconvenienced on the same couch only last week. Later on there are three such interruptions, in spaced succession, of the same scene but with a different young soldier each time.

Miss Kirkland is given some artificial "sophisticated" lines to speak about the animal behavior induced by smalltown dullness, including an unfilial reflection on the morals of her mother (Miss Walker), on whom an ambitious and importunate young actor (Mr. Nugent) has turned the faucet of his charm, hoping to secure from her financial backing for a play. The matron takes the actor's acting seriously and follows him back to New York, where she proposes to set up housekeeping with him without benefit of clergy and star with him on the stage.

But the actor's tiny New York hotel apartment has already been shared for some years, in sin, as the saying goes, by a blond stenographer (Miss Brooks.) There is a mixup involving incriminating evidence in the form of a black sheer silk nightie, which the matron has concealed in the actor's bed and which causes her husband, who has followed her to New York, to return to his iron mills with the blonde as his secretary, leaving his wife to grapple with the harassed actor. Divorce proceedings, however, are thwarted by Miss Kirkland, who frames her father and the blonde and brings about a reconciliation between mother and dad under threat of scandal.

"Blue Holiday"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
MAY 22, 1945.

'Blue Holiday' Has Ethel Waters, Josh White and Too Little Speed

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The names of Ethel Waters and Josh White alone are enough to entice one into a theatre, for these are among the best Negro singers. Add such items as a group of Katherine Dunham dancers and Hall Johnson's choir and one has the makings of a good evening.

"Blue Holiday," which was presented last night at the Belasco, has Waters, White, Dunham, Johnson and some others—but these remain only the makings. The ingredients perversely decline to blend, with the result that "Blue Holiday" is on the order of an old-style Sunday Night Concert instead of being an integrated, well-paced show.

Miss Waters needs no introduction to anybody. She can sing "Stormy Weather" so that, no matter where one may hear a snatch of the tune, one thinks immediately of Ethel Waters. It is her song, and so is almost any other song in her repertory. She also can act, and six years ago it was her acting and not her singing which made "Mamba's Daughters" look like a better play than it really was.

Scenes from a Play.

Last night Miss Waters chose to do brief scenes from "Mamba's Daughters"—and, vivid though the scenes be, I think it was a mistake. The scenes are holding only if one remembers the play, and not many theatre patrons will recall it now. Not many will think again of the opening night and the frightening violence with which Miss Waters strangled the villain, Willie Bryant. Mr. Bryant was on hand again last night, but Ethel was easy on him.

Josh White is known mostly to night club patrons and phonograph record buyers. He is the man who made "One Meat Ball" a national lament. He has stage presence, is a masterful guitar-plucker, and possesses some fascinating vocal tricks. He slides his voice around in a kind of slow yodel, and his plaintive off-pitch notes are fascinating. In "Blue Holiday" his numbers include "Evil-Hearted Man" and "Hard Time Blues"—and "Meat Ball," of course. I wish he'd had time to sing one of my favorite Josh Whites, "T. B. Blues."

A Splendid Chorus.

More than one of last night's attendants at the Belasco remarked that the finest number in the show was the opening—"The Star-Spangled Banner"—sung by Mr. Johnson's choir. It was inspiring—and so, later on, were "I Got a Mule" and "Fare Ye Well." It is no news that the Negro is the finest of all choral singers, the Don Cossacks not excepted.

"Blue Holiday" has the numbers, all right, but it does not have the pace. Not until late in the evening, when a trio of knockabout dancers called the Chocolateers appears, does an element of speed arise. The Dunham dancers do some very nice Haitian rituals, Mary Lou Williams plays some boogie-woogie in a slightly frightened manner and one Timmie Rogers tells some bad jokes with some beautiful teeth.

'BLUE HOLIDAY.'

A variety show presented by Irvin Shapiro and Doris Cole at the Belasco Theater May 21, 1945. Staged by Monroe B. Hack. Music and Lyrics by Al Moritz. Additional songs by Duke Ellington, Morey Amsterdam, E. Y. Harburg and Earl Robinson. Production designed by Perry Watkins. Choral direction by Hall Johnson. Costumes by Kasia.

The cast: Ethel Waters, Josh White, Willie Bryant, Timmie Rogers, Mary Lou Williams, Hall Johnson Choir, Katherine Dunham Dancers, the Three Poms, Lillian Fitzgerald, the Chocolateers, Josephine Premice, Evelyn Ellis and Mildred Smith.

New York Journal-American

May 22, 1945

'Blue Holiday' Bows At the Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

There's no telling to whom Ethel Waters has been listening. Not to her better judgment, I'm sure. For "Blue Holiday" which, despite its frenetic energy, limped last night into the Belasco, is well off her familiar, her fascinating, her friendly beam. Somebody has been messing with her method and her material. That somebody should be ashamed. Confidentially, I think I know the meddler's name.

In the "new variety show" starring Miss Waters and featuring, as the Broadway saying goes, Willie Bryant, Timmie Rogers, Mary Lou Williams, the Hall Johnson Choir and some Katherine Dunham Dancers, few intervals are what, or where, they started out to be. Coming in at the last moment as director, Jed Harris disrupted Moe Hack's original arrangements, turning them upside down.

And inside out, I'll tell you. Unless my eyes and ears deceive me, Muriel Gaines and her "Alley Cat" calypso, Lillian Fitzgerald and her "Blue Holiday" which gives the piece its name, and Charles Holland and his "Flower Song" from "Carmen," have completely disappeared. Miss Waters, with her scenes from "Mamba's Daughters," and Miss Waters, with her Marian Roberts at the piano, have been transposed.

You can't believe every program you read at the Belasco. You couldn't last night, no matter what they told you. And they told you many things. Some less woe-begone than others.

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Uneven Evening

Here's what happens to the best of my well-disposed ability. Three wild and wishful-thinking dancers open up the evening. They may be The Poms. Or, on the other hand, they may not be. Perhaps I'll never know. Willie Bryant, mistaken at first for the new owner of the theatre, announces himself as Master of the Ceremonies. It's a dubious designation.

Timmie Rogers tells stories and has himself a time. He enjoys himself tremendously in the literal meaning of the term. Only a hopeful backer could take him in his stride. However, there were hopeful backers all around, judging by the made-to-order laughter and applause. Mary Lou Williams plays with a piano. "The Limehouse Blues." A Duke Ellington medley. Boogie-woogie of her own.

The Hall Johnson Choir sings. It sings "I Got a Mule" and "Fare Ye Well." Each is registered as "traditional." They're followed by W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues," magnificently delivered by Mr. Johnson's little band of serious singers. It is, I feel, the high spot of a low-geared evening. It's superior, most certainly, to Josh White's self-conscious "The House I Live In."

Or to "The Free and Equal Blues," with words by E. Y. Harburg of "Bloomer Girl" renown and Earl Robinson of "The Lonesome Train" and "Ballad For Americans."

* * *

Misses the Mark

The dance numbers, credited to Katherine Dunham, seem derivative and out-moded. Even when transposed from one act to the other, "Fiji Island," featuring Lavinia Williams and Talley Beatty, and "Voodoo in Haiti," have little new to offer. The Tony Pastor Cafe scene in "Carmen Jones" brought these orgiastic tom-tom-isms to a head. Beatrice Lillie's burlesque in the "Seven Lively Arts" brought them to an end. I had hoped so, at any rate. But, no!

Josh White's songs, other than "The Free and Equal Blues," in which he has a part, are Louis Jordon's "Outskirts of Town," his own and Warren Cuney's "Hard-Time Blues" and his personal arrangement of the traditional ballad known as "Evil Hearted Man." And, of course, the "One Meat Ball," without which a session at Up-or-Downtown Cafe Society is incomplete. He reprojects it skillfully.

But even the beloved, the brilliant Ethel Waters can't manage to lift "Blue Holiday" out of its disastrous doldrums. Of a certainty, the unnamed somebody who has been playing around with Miss Waters' method and material has made mischief there. Words and music have been streamlined, brought unbecomingly down-to-date. Miss Waters has been streamlined, too. Her heart-warming simplicity has been unsimplified, made fussy, foolish and unfamiliar...

I've no clear idea how good, bad or indifferent "Blue Holiday" was before Jed Harris came rushing to its rescue. But, at the same time, I'm only too well aware that it misses its mark at the Belasco.

NEW YORK POST
MAY 22, 1945

'Blue Holiday' Brings Ethel Waters Back to Town

By Wilella Waldorf

"Blue Holiday," produced at the Belasco last night, is described in the program as a new variety show. Actually, very little of the material is new, and the performance is chiefly a series of recitals by talented Negro entertainers and specialists, some of whom are more at home in cafe society.

Ethel Waters, the star, devotes a considerable part of her allotted time to re-enacting two melodramatic scenes from her Broadway success of some years ago, "Mamba's Daughters," and it was nearly eleven last night before she appeared in a yellow evening gown, with an orchid in her hair, to confide some of her intimate song numbers to an audience that had obviously been waiting for her and growing restless in the process.

Another favorite of the evening was Josh White, a serious-minded, intensely socially-conscious young man with a guitar and a trick of tossing his voice around until it sometimes approaches a refined, somewhat muted, yodel, if there is such a thing. Mr. White finally unbent sufficiently to sing his celebrated meat-ball song, which is still amusing, if a trifle out of date during the present shortage. If the meat crisis persists, he might do well to revise the words somewhat to indicate that you can get plenty of bread but not one meat ball.

The ever-faithful Hall Johnson Choir does its usual effective job, and there are colorful and noisy Voodoo and Fiji Island dances by the Katherine Dunham Dancers; smart piano rhythms by Mary Lou Williams, of the cafes, and fast stepping by the Three Poms of Harlem and Josephine Premice, an attractive young person from Haiti.

Most of the time "Blue Holiday" smacks more of a concert hall than of vaudeville, which is fair enough except that efforts have been made to follow the regulation Broadway variety-revue routine by introducing Willie Bryant and Timmie Rogers as masters of ceremonies patterned after the Lou Holtz, George Jessel school.

Both Mr. Bryant and Mr. Rogers have definite assets as stage performers, but nobody has bothered to give them proper material to work with here, and, unlike Holtz, Jessel and the rest, they seem to have very few aged but still funny gags to fall back on. The jokes they do pull are very limp indeed, with the result that there is not much comedy in "Blue Holiday."

It is a holiday chiefly for passionate blues addicts. As a new variety show it lacks variety and novelty.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
MAY 22, 1945.

'Blue Holiday' at Belasco Vaudeville at its Dullest

By Burton Rascoe

Vaudeville raised its feeble head at the Belasco last night and sank right back into a coma. The occasion was the presentation of a variety bill called "Blue Holiday," starring Ethel Waters. There were brief agreeable moments furnished by Miss Waters, the Hall Johnson Choir, Josh White and Mary Lou Williams, respectively; but the over-all effect was that of the dullest and most discomforting effort at that kind of entertainment.

The only attempts at humor were supplied by one Timmie Rogers, who is noisy, frenetic, foul-mouthed and excruciatingly unfunny, and by some knock-abouts whose humor consists of jumping up and down and screaming, riding a chair like a kiddy car around the stage, falling prone and supine with loud thumps and hitting one another over the head with hats. Mr. Rogers has achieved a new low in sewer scraping for his gags; and, whatever merit there is in some of the numbers is vitiated by his unpleasant ubiquitousness.

Miss Waters Sings.

Miss Waters appears in a sketch from "Mamba's Daughters," in which, as the dumb and lumbering Hagar, she throttles her daughter's betrayer and blackmailer. Miss Water's contribution to this has force and dignity; but the sketch is otherwise crudely done and is out of place in a vaudeville bill. At the close Miss Waters sings some of the familiar songs in her repertory, including the one most closely identified with her, "Stormy Weather."

Josh White, whose musicianship in blues songs and ballads excites rhapsodies of praise from connoisseurs and who has an ingratiating presence, ease and assurance, sings "Hard Times Blues," "Evil-Hearted Man," "The House I Live In," "One Meat Ball" and, with Mr. Rogers and the Hall Johnson Choir, a new song relating that the doctor told him at the blood bank the happy news that plasma has no race or creed and that corpuscles are international.

Choir Is Splendid.

The Hall Johnson Choir is, to me, one of the great artistic organizations of our time, the voices a heavenly delight. The choir opened the show by singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" with a spine-tingling perfection and later on offered two spirituals and "The St. Louis Blues," with choral arrangements by Mr. Johnson.

Miss Williams plays one highly syncopated piano number with her customary quiet pyrotechnics. A disproportionate part of the bill is made up of Lindy hop dancers, boogie woogie strutters and acrobatic hoofers, all mediocre and all addicted to an artificial, pumped-up kind of jollity and excitement.

NEW YORK PM
MAY 22, 1945.

Not Very Much Holiday Spirit

PM Reviews

—*Kronenberger*

In view of how distinctive Negro singing and dancing can be, a Negro variety show or revue is always a good idea for Broadway. But *Blue Holiday* is not the first such show in which the idea has somehow miscarried, in which a number of people—some with much and some with moderate talent—can't make the collective grade. Perhaps the most crippling feature of *Blue Holiday* is its maladroit program-making. Calling itself a variety show, it is badly lacking in variety; and almost equally lacking in the verve and pace traditionally associated with vaudeville. It too often seems heavy and monotonous. More of it is on the serious side than is good for it, because the serious numbers do not display enough originality or art. And the best performers are perhaps at their happiest in night clubs rather than on Broadway.

Ethel Waters is starred in *Blue Holiday*, but it is Josh White who contributes much the most to the show. Miss Waters appears twice—once in two scenes from *Mamba's Daughters*, once in a series of songs. The scenes from *Mamba's Daughters* are a mistake. Torn out of context, they do not add up to anything; and except for a brief moment or two, Miss Waters never recaptures the qualities that made her original performance in the Heyward play so moving. Nor are her song numbers effective. Al Moritz has not provided good material, and Miss Waters herself has very misguidedly gone cute instead of really singing. I hope she will go back to really singing, for she certainly once knew how.

Josh White's way with a song is very much his own, and very pleasing, whether with a social-minded tune or with the famous comic ditty about the little man who ordered one meat ball. Mary Lou Williams plays boogie-woogie well, and Josephine Premice does some Haitian songs and dances in a very individual and rather interesting style.

The Katherine Dunham Dancers and the Hall Johnson Choir, working sometimes together and sometimes apart, both have their virtues. But beyond my own decided lack of enthusiasm for the Dunham type of choreography, both these groups ultimately weigh down the show because they are not offset by light or gay enough performers. The Three Poms are minor-leaguers at tap and acrobatic dancing, and so are The Chocolateers at rough-and-tumble. And Timmie Rogers, who tries to inject comedy into the proceedings, has only a brash manner and vulgar jokes. Willie Bryant makes an unobjectionable master of ceremonies; but as things stand, *Blue Holiday* needs somebody much better than that, somebody with terrific personality, to spark it. For with all the good will in the world, one must call the greater part of it a bore.

—Louis Kronenberger